



The African Communist

BA 320.53205 AFR
S.90/61

JOURNAL OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN COMMUNIST PARTY



Mass party or vanguard?

Does it have to be one without the other...

A TASTE OF KEY DEBATES FACING THE 8TH PARTY CONGRESS

INKULULEKO PUBLICATIONS

Distributors of The African Communist

PO Box 1027

Johannesburg 2000

Phone (011) 836-6867

Subscription rates

SOUTH AFRICA

All enquiries to
The South African Communist Party,
PO Box 1027, Johannesburg 2000, South Africa

**AFRICA, EUROPE
and ASIA**

£12 per year including postage surface mail
£18 per year airmail

NORTH AMERICA

\$24 per year including postage surface mail
\$36 per year airmail

ISSN 0001-9976

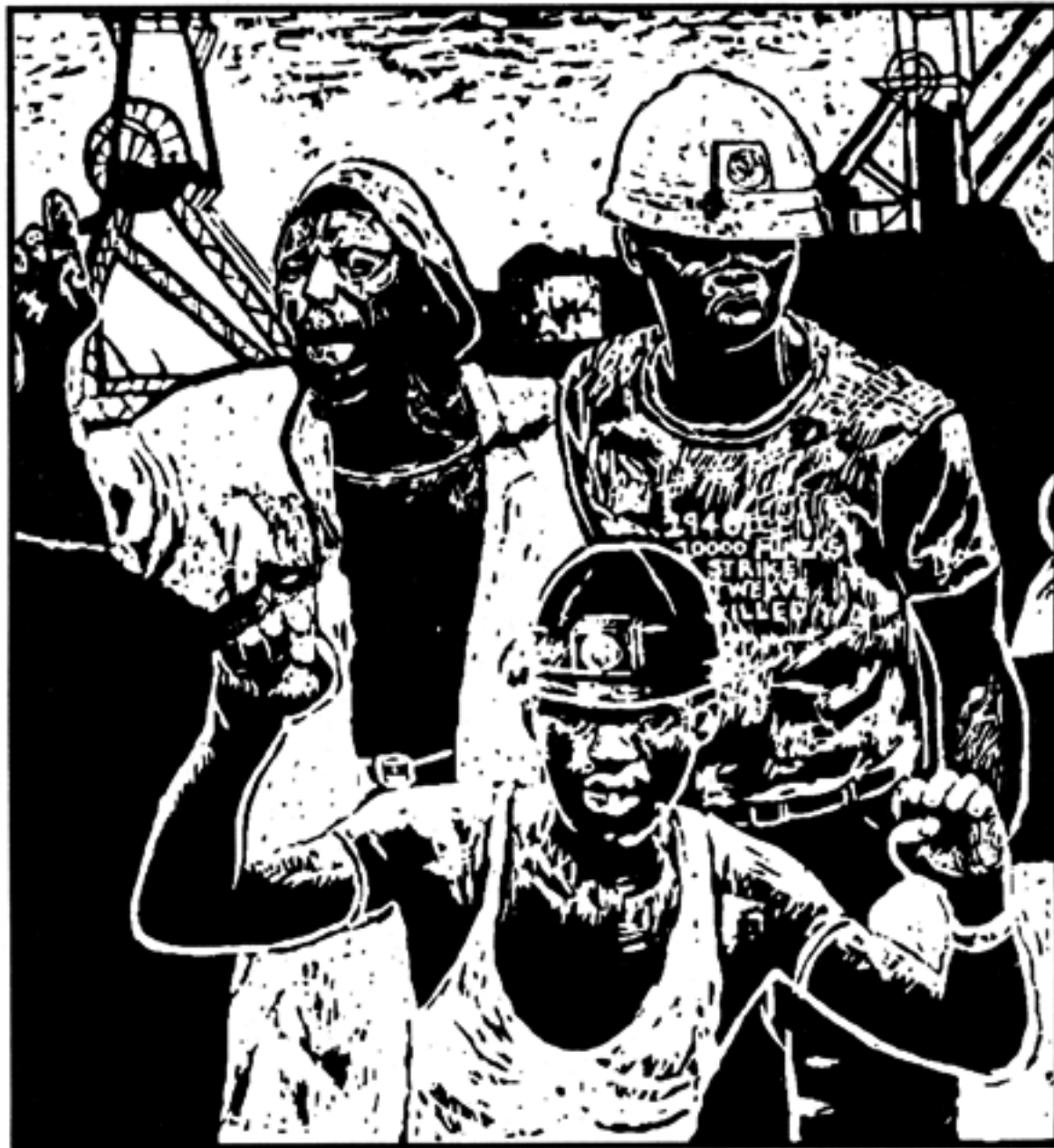
THE AFRICAN COMMUNIST

**Published quarterly as a forum for Marxist-Leninist thought
by the South African Communist Party**

No. 127 — Fourth Quarter 1991

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Graphic: CAP

Our Eighth Congress

Little more than two and a half years ago, in his closing remarks to the SACP's 7th Congress in Cuba, Joe Slovo made a vow. "The 8th Congress of the SACP will be held on home soil!"

At those words the congress erupted in cheering. It was not light-hearted cheering. It was cheering born of determination. To the delegates of that congress, including a number in disguise who had been smuggled out of the country, there was no doubt that we would fulfill that vow. But we expected, in all probability, that it would be

an underground 8th Congress that we would be organising.

Slovo's vow is now about to be fulfilled, but in the broad light of day in the centre of Johannesburg. The advance of our struggle and the enemy's retreat has been more rapid than we had expected.

In the first quarter of 1989, as we sat down at our 7th Congress there were signs of a deepening crisis in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. But not even the most optimistic right-winger was predicting such a rapid and total collapse. Who, in the first

quarter of 1989, would have said that in just two and a half years the 20 million strong ruling CPSU would be dissolved in the Soviet Union?

On the home front, our 1989 congress was aware of the growing prospect of negotiations, and the party programme made reference to this possibility. But here too events have moved much more rapidly than many were expecting.

With such major changes, both traumatic and triumphant, it might be expected that the SACP, a party banned for 40 years, would be more than a little off-balance at the end of 1991. But this is not so.

In fact, we believe that our party has come through this last testing period with skill and purpose. Our party cadres have played a leading role in helping to ground the ANC, in helping it to become the overwhelmingly largest political formation in our country. After a difficult first year in the open once more, the ANC is now moving ahead with greater confidence, more and more it is seizing back the tactical and strategic initiative that De Klerk temporarily won in 1990.

Yet, at the same time, and in the space of some eleven months, many of the same party cadres, who have been in the forefront of ANC building, have found the time to increase our party membership some twenty-fold. With 249 branches and 8 regions the SACP is, today, in terms of real membership, amongst the three largest parties in the country.

In the new post-February 2 1990 conditions, and sooner perhaps than the ANC itself, our party in its interim regional and national structures, was able to unite the different currents of our struggle - the exiles, those from the deep underground, the released prisoners and thousands of cadres

from trade union and mass democratic struggles. Without reneging for a moment on our principles and traditions, our party has shown itself open to debate, forward-looking and not time-bound. The debate initiated by Joe Slovo with his pamphlet, *Has Socialism Failed?*, continues within and beyond our party.

Of course, there are many testing challenges and unsolved difficulties. The party continues to suffer from the over-extension of its leading cadres, a high proportion of whom are full-time in the ANC and in COSATU unions. More than 90% of our 20,000 members are totally new to the party. In the coming year, therefore, a major effort at organisational and ideological consolidation will have to be undertaken. The 8th Congress will be discussing this. It will also discuss the specific role and profile of the SACP within the context of the ANC-led alliance.

And where will we be two and half years from now?

Certainly within South Africa the situation will continue to be extremely fluid. The groundswell support for our immediate political demands - for an Interim Government and a democratically elected Constituent Assembly - has grown powerfully. We are certain that these demands will be won. But, precisely because we are on course for the realisation of our immediate and longer-term strategic objectives, our enemies can be expected to strike back with ferocity. There is every possibility that the dirty war of targeted assassination and indiscriminate terror will be extended.

There are many opportunities and many dangers ahead. One thing is certain. The discussions and resolutions of the SACP's 8th Congress will impact powerfully on the unfolding process.

Free our political prisoners

December 16th marks the 30th anniversary of Umkhonto we Sizwe. Let us use this anniversary to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of our MK cadres and all other political prisoners still held in apartheid jails.

Among those still imprisoned by De Klerk are:

- **MZONDELELI NONDULA and MTHE-THELI MNCUBE**, who are still being held on Death Row in Pretoria. Comrades Nondula and Mncube are MK operatives who were active, in separate units, in the northern Transvaal during 1985. Nondula is from Mdantsane, East London. He left the country in 1981 at the age of 19. Mncube is from Diepkloof, Soweto. They were captured between December 1986 and January 1987 and brutally tortured. Most of the charges against them related to landmine explosions in the northern Transvaal which resulted in several deaths. Mncube was also charged with the killing of two security policemen who had captured him and thrown him into a van with the bodies of his comrades. He managed to escape, killing his captors in the process. He was recaptured eight days later after failing to find his way back across the border. Both comrades have now spent three and a half years on Death Row.

- **ROBERT McBRIDE**: He was captured in July 1986 and tortured while being held under Section 29 of the Internal Security Act. He was sentenced to death in April 1987. At the time he was 23 years old. He was sentenced, among other things, for a

car bomb attack on a bar in Durban known to be frequented by off-duty SADF and SAP personnel. The attack resulted in three deaths. He was also convicted on ten counts of "terrorism" for various sabotage attacks on installations in Natal. He masterminded and carried out the heroic springing of Gordon Webster while Webster was under armed guard in the Edendale hospital. After four years in the shadow of the gallows (and after more than 300 people had been executed during his time on Death Row) McBride's death sentences were commuted to life imprisonment. Comrade Robert McBride is presently being held in Westville prison in Durban.

- **SIBUSISO SENELE MASUKU**: Comrade Masuku is from Soshanguve outside Pretoria. He was sentenced to death on August 31 1987 for the killing of a policeman. The policeman was killed during a night vigil for an activist who had been gunned down by police. Originally 95 youths were arrested for this murder, the majority of them between the ages of nine and thirteen. Masuku was charged with this murder while already in prison, serving a ten year sentence for MK actions. Comrade Masuku's death sentence was recently commuted to 30 years. He remains behind bars.

Besides these comrades, there are 4 MK members (Frans Mokomana, Rodney More, Petrus Mothupi and John Pilane) imprisoned in Bophutatswana. There are a further 96 political prisoners still in Bop jails including 81 BDF soldiers and 5 PPP members from the coup attempt against

Mangope, and one AZANLA operative.

There are also approximately 290 political prisoners (broadly categorised as "unrest-related") who were members of various youth, civic and trade union structures and whose actions arose out of the struggles inside the country. A large number are Eastern Cape activists, products of the 1980s which saw a virtual civil war raging through the urban and rural areas of this part of our country. But imprisoned comrades from the period of the states of emergency and the mass struggles of the 1980s are to be found scattered throughout our country. They include the remaining four of the original Sharpeville Six, and members of the Upington 14.

Dieter Gerhardt, who was convicted of High Treason on the grounds that he was spying for the Soviet Union in order to assist the liberation movements in their efforts to overthrow the state, remains in prison.

We also have MK members currently awaiting trial. They include Jacob Rapholo, Joseph Koetle, Jeremy Seeber and Sipho Elias Mabena.

De Klerk continues to claim that there are no more political prisoners in South Africa. He says there are only criminals left

in prison. De Klerk knows that he is lying.

If our MK operatives are criminals, then why were they detained under Section 29 of the Internal Security Act? Why were they charged with "terrorism" and with attempting to overthrow the state? Why were they charged with furthering the aims of the ANC? Our comrades took part in an armed struggle against an illegitimate regime. They operated under the discipline of our organisations.

The nearly 300 comrades who remain in jail for their actions against policemen, councillors, kitskonstabels and notorious traitors are also clearly political prisoners. Their actions were motivated by political ideals, not by any personal gain. While the members of the security forces who fired on crowds of protesters, who shot and killed women and children in KwaNobuhle, Langa, and many other places, have never gone to jail (in many cases they have actually received promotions), it is a bitter irony that ordinary men and women, some very young, remain behind bars awaiting decisions from the so-called Indemnity Committees.

FREE OUR MK HEROES! FREE ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS IMMEDIATELY AND UNCONDITIONALLY!

Poor, powerless Julian Ogilvie Thompson

'God knows...we all know perfectly well that the influence business had on the NP was minimal. I don't expect that the influence of business on the new democracy in South Africa is going to be any different."

The words are those of Julian Ogilvie

Thompson, chairman of South Africa's enormous Anglo-American Corporation empire.

He goes on to utter what must count as the South African quote of the year: *"I may be the chairman of a big group, but just like anybody else I have one vote."*

This is breath-takingly arrogant. In the first place, the great majority in our country still do not have the vote (a "minor" detail that seems to have escaped Ogilvie Thompson). But, more interesting, Ogilvie Thompson's simple disclaimer reveals transparently the very essence of bourgeois liberal ideology.

What is the essence of liberalism? It is an adherence to FORMAL equality, to the APPEARANCE of equality, the better to disguise massive REAL inequality. Ogilvie Thompson disclaims power, the better to preserve it.

True, here in South Africa even formal equality (equal rights, equal citizenship, one-person one-vote) has been absent. Winning formal equality will, therefore, be an important step forward. But Ogilvie Thompson's quote of the year is there to remind us that formal equality can cover up a multitude of sins.

Is Ogilvie Thompson's political power seriously reducible to his one vote once every five years? That's laughable. In the first place, he is less than honest when he claims that big business has had a negligible influence on the NP. True, there have been times when the apartheid regime and big business have had their lovers' quarrels. But today the influence of big business on the NP is so pervasive, so thorough, that their voices are indistinguishable on all the major political, social and economic questions of our country.

Even more to the point is the fact that Ogilvie Thompson is expressing the views we have just quoted in *The Star* (October 1, 1991), the flagship of The Argus newspaper group. Now The Argus group happens to be owned by Anglo-American. The Argus group accounts for half the daily newspapers sold in South Africa. Among Anglo's

other media-related holdings is Times Media Limited, which in turn has a 23% stake in M-Net. Anglo also happens to own a major stake in the key media distribution company CNA, and it has a large share of the Mondi/Sappi paper production cartel.

In short, apart from its gigantic presence in every sector of our economy (from mining, services and manufacture to banking and farming), Anglo-American also controls a huge ideological empire. It is an empire whose ability to manufacture "public opinion" and therefore influence politics should not be underrated for a moment.

Now we are not suggesting that Ogilvie Thompson, at the summit of this massive ideological apparatus, dictates every last word and sentence that gets published in his newspapers. In fact, as an individual he probably has very little, if any, direct daily influence on these newspapers. But he doesn't need to!

The editors of the key newspapers, like the directors of M-Net, all live and breathe the same general values and outlook of Anglo-American. That's why they were appointed to their posts in the first place. They share with Ogilvie Thompson the same basic assumptions - that the "free market" is God's gift to the 20th century, that nationalisation is a "crime against humanity", that the rich are rich because they are superior and the poor are poor because they don't work hard enough. If The Argus group editors, like the Times Media editors, didn't believe these things they wouldn't be where they are.

Facing the very page of *The Star* on which Ogilvie Thompson tells us that "just like anybody else I have one vote", is a long editorial. I am sure that the editorial and the interview with Ogilvie Thompson were not particularly planned to gaze lovingly

upon each other from facing pages. But the editorial is one of those coincidences that are not exactly fortuitous.

The editorial slams the ANC and Nelson Mandela: "On Friday, Mr Mandela exhumed again the specious proposition that his government would nationalise mines and financial institutions because there was no other way. The kindest thing that can be said about the suggestion is that he didn't really mean it; that he was casting a forlorn bone to his own diehards, some of whom live in a socialist past and still itch to get their hands on wealth, ostensibly so that

they can channel it to the poor," etc., etc.

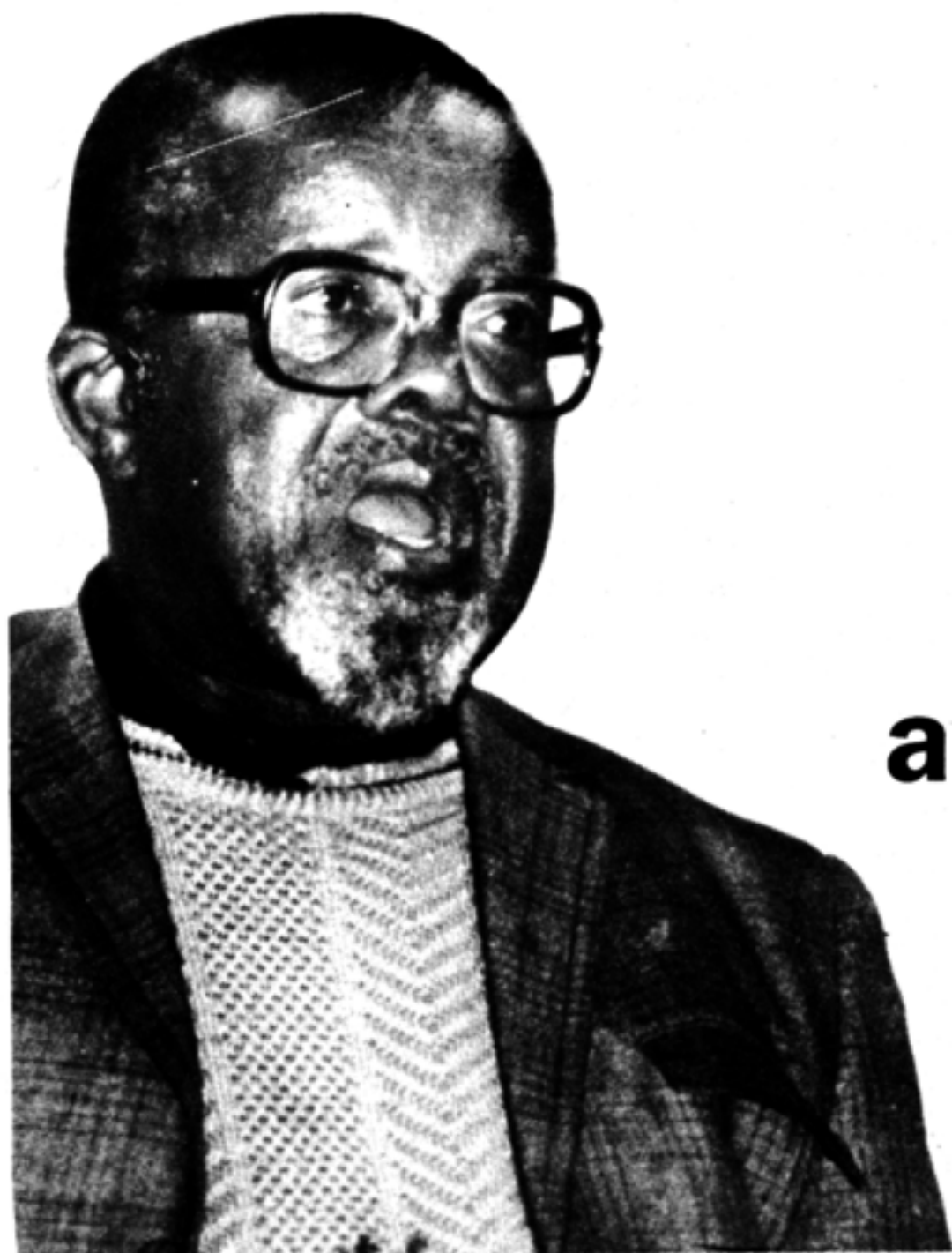
For the editorialist on *The Star* some thoughts are simply unthinkable, "he didn't really mean it". Some thoughts are disqualified, almost before they are uttered. They are simply beyond the bounds.

One-vote-like-everybody-else Ogilvie Thompson didn't have to dictate these views to his editorialist. Like the famous dog on those old LP records, the editors of Anglo's newspapers have been listening to His Master's Voice for so long they can now reproduce the ideology of big business without the slightest coaching. ★

In their own words...

CHERYL CAROLUS: "I'm involved in politics precisely because I am NOT a politician. You don't think I'm going to let any damn politician run my life, do you?"
- Cheryl Carolus, SACP national Interim Leadership Group, and ANC National Executive Committee member. - *Vrye Weekblad*

GROUCHO MARXISM: "I don't think that we are at the end of socialism. I think we can say, about socialism, what another Marx, Groucho, said about sex: it is going to be with us for a while." - Ernesto Laclau, *Marxism Today*



A party of the working class, or an amorphous mess

Harry Gwala

With the demise of socialism in eastern Europe the working class is facing its biggest challenge today. This has led to many ideas, some of which challenge the very theoretical foundations of Marxism-Leninism. Some people are even shy to mention Lenin, let alone the theoretical works of Stalin. All this throws a new challenge to our Marxist theoreticians today.

The problems facing us are by no means new. They

date back to the opportunist Bernstein who, when faced with what appeared to be formidable capitalism, started talking about "freedom to criticise" Marx, demanding "a revision of the Marxist doctrine" (hence the term "revisionism"). Bernstein demanded a renunciation of the revolution, of socialism and of the dictatorship of the proletariat.¹

Lenin was to be faced with the same ideas coming from the "economists". They too renounced the dictatorship of the proletariat and demanded "freedom of criticism". They denied that the party had a leading role to play. It is interesting that those who are revising Marx today are coming up with the same old rejected theory - that of renouncing the dictatorship of the proletariat and vanguard role of the party. In an attempt to refute Marxism-Leninism they come up with an alarming statement that Marx, Engels and Lenin were often wrong. In other words they are trying to repudiate the scientific basis of Marxism-Leninism. They are telling us that in the case of a breakdown you can use a steering wheel in the place of a car wheel because both these are circular in shape. They see no difference between eleven and one because they are all strokes.

Not suprising

It is not surprising that this logic has led them to seeing all classes and people as being the same and thus qualifying for an amorphous party. They pose the question: "who is to be the judge of who should be a member of the party?" Obviously no one can be a judge in such an amorphous organisation.

Of course Lenin dealt with this aspect some 88 years ago and yet it keeps surfacing. Dealing with this question the *Short*

History of the CPSU says:

"Lenin regarded the party as an organised detachment, whose members cannot just be enrolled. Thus, unlike Lenin's formulations, Martov's formulation would throw the door of the party wide open to unstable non-proletarian elements. On the eve of the bourgeois democratic revolution there were people among the bourgeois intelligentsia who for a while sympathised with the revolution. From time to time they might render some small service to the party. But such people would not join an organisation, submit to party discipline, carry out party tasks and run accompanying risks. Yet Martov and other Mensheviks proposed to regard such people as party members, and to accord them the right and opportunity to influence party affairs. They even proposed to grant any striker the right to 'enroll' himself in the party although non-socialist, anarchist and Socialist Revolutionaries also took part in strikes."²

Old-fashioned

Of course our comrades tell us that this is old fashioned and that these are the days of Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin. We agree with them on this assertion and know that these new times with their new ideas have led to the disarming of the working class and the demise of socialism in the face of aggressive imperialism.

This departure from Marxism-Leninism was to appear again immediately after the end of the second world war. Earl Browder in the USA proposed to dissolve the Communist Party and set up the Association of Communists, which allowed everyone to be a member. Browder, like our modern Browderites, argued that during the war many Americans had participated in destroying nazism and in so doing had worked



modern South African marxists. From 1976 there was a revolutionary upswing in the people's struggle for liberation. The revolutionary youth was attracted to Marxism. Marxism-Leninism became the fashion. Unfortunately this revolutionary zeal was not matched by revolutionary theory. Most of these people were weak in theory and inexperienced in political organisation and therefore had only a vague, and for the most part incorrect, idea of Marxism derived from "legal" Marxism as supplied by universities and those books purporting to be the works of Marx.

With mass participation in the struggle and the working class embarking evermore on militant action, our Marxists were even attracted by the language of some of these

closely with communists and that therefore admission into the party should be wide enough to allow such elements. At the time this brought about a lot of controversy. It was comrade Duclos of the French Communist Party who exposed and destroyed this revisionism of Earl Browder. In Yugoslavia Djilas and Rankovich proposed a "League of Communists", saying that all those who had participated in the patriotic war against nazism were eligible to the membership of this League of Communists.

We find the same reasoning in our own

people and began to talk of democratic socialism and abandoned scientific socialism. In a great stampede from the so-called "personality cult" and bureaucratic practices they began to advocate a mass party which allowed everyone in. To them democracy became something that existed somewhere in space and was an ideal to be attained.

To speak of democracy in abstract is as wicked as speaking of society in general.

Democracy in abstract is nothing but bourgeois philistinism.

Every Marxist knows the history of the

word "democracy" and that it relates to society in time and place.

Unless we make it clear that today democracy means capitalism we shall ourselves do the work of the bourgeois theoreticians and deceive the working masses.

Socialism as expounded by Marx and Engels is scientific. It does not become less so because of some malpractices.

Speaking of this point in a different situation Lenin says of Kautsky: "One cannot help smiling at Kautsky's efforts to make it appear that there are people who preach contempt for democracy and so forth. That is the sort of twaddle Kautsky uses to befog and confuse the issue, for he talks like the liberals, speaking of democracy in general, and not of bourgeois democracy. He even avoids using this precise, class term, and instead, tries to speak about 'pre-socialist democracy'." ³

Gorbachev, not Lenin

We have quoted extensively from Lenin and in this we shall earn the wrath of our modern Marxists whose ideal is not Lenin but Gorbachev. For they tell us that socialism has produced Gorbachev.

But we would rather move together with the SACP which clearly states [in its 1962 programme] that:

"The genius of Vladimir Lenin, recognised leader of the workers and oppressed people of all countries, threw a bright light on the further development of 20th century capitalism into its highest and last stage - Imperialism." ⁴

Further on the 1962 programme says: "Mankind will enter upon a greater freedom, in terms of the principles of communism. But this great change will not come about of its own accord, or by persuading the capitalist ruling classes that change is

reasonable and desirable. No ruling class in history ever bowed itself gracefully off the stage... Due to differences of history and national tradition, which the Communist Parties take into account, the precise path to socialism will differ from one country to another. But international experiences show that certain basic laws apply to all countries. Headed by the Marxist-Leninist Party and in alliance with most of the peasants and other working people, the working class must destroy the state of dictatorship of the capitalists, and replace it with the dictatorship of the working class, offering the widest democracy to the great majority of the people..." ⁵

Thus we have come to the crossroads. Either a Marxist-Leninist party has the vanguard role of mobilising all the working class and its allies the peasants and the middle class and leading them into a national democratic revolution headed by the African National Congress, or it becomes an amorphous mess which allows in all and sundry and works towards reforming capitalism into "democratic" socialism.

No compromise

Here there can be no compromise - either a vanguard party or just another labour party or social democratic party.

It is the task of the working class to come out clearly and defend the party of Marx, Engels and Lenin.

We must eradicate petty-bourgeois ideas parading as Marxism. ★

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1. *Short History of the CPSU Bolsheviks*, Moscow, 1942, p.37.
2. *Ibid.* p.42.
3. *Marx, Engels, Lenin on Historical Materialism*, p.604.
4. "The Road to South African Freedom", 1962 SACP programme, in *South African Communists Speak*, Inkululeko Publications, London, 1981, p.287.
5. *Ibid.*, pp.291-2.



Lenin is not a statue

Jeremy Cronin replies to Harry Gwala

All over eastern Europe and the Soviet Union statues of Lenin are being torn down. The spectacle of toppling statues of the most outstanding revolutionary figure of our century brings great joy to our class enemies here in South Africa. They imagine that, by knocking down stone and bronze, the living legacy of Lenin is

also somehow being destroyed. In this they are profoundly wrong.

Unfortunately, there are those like comrade Harry Gwala who, in wanting to defend Marxism-Leninism, share almost exactly the same illusion as the demolishers. They want to stand guard over Lenin the Statue. They confuse the role of a revolu-

tionary with that of a museum curator, or a high priest of some elite cult protecting a holy shrine. At the end of the day this is deeply anti-Leninist, it flies in the face of all that Lenin struggled for. This is not vanguardism - it is rearguardism.

This rearguardism produces a number of wild, demagogic sallies and inconsistencies in the course of Gwala's short paper ("A Party of the working class, or an amorphous mess"). For instance, he sniffs at the right to "freedom of criticism" within the party. And yet, in the act of sniffing, he is exercising that very right! He even goes so far as to call on the working class (whom he has just excluded in its overwhelming numbers from party membership) to "eradicate" (whatever that might mean) the "petty bourgeois ideas" of the present SACP leadership.

In another passage, Gwala correctly criticises vague references to "democracy in general", but then he tries to subsume the call for "democratic socialism" under this vagueness. But to call for democratic socialism is, precisely, to link the question of democracy to socialism, to the class struggle. There is nothing vague, and there is nothing unscientific about that.

But it is, in particular, to the question of the Leninist theory of the vanguard party that I want to address myself in criticising the general assumptions present in Gwala's article. In order to address this question we must, in the first place I suggest, take Marxism-Leninism seriously *as a science*, in other words as a living body of theory. It has its basic principles and concepts, on whose foundation a much broader theory is constantly being developed, revised, extended, enriched and transformed as a result of concrete practice, theoretical work and collective struggle.

The unprincipled abandonment of basic concepts, not because they have proved to be wrong, but because they are tactically embarrassing, is opportunism. But the freezing of Marxism-Leninism into a closed and unchanging doctrine, a blue-print that simply requires application in any given situation, is dogmatism. It is, of course, this latter tendency that is so evident in Gwala's intervention.

Despite his invocations of scientific socialism, Gwala treats Marxism-Leninism, not as a science, but as a Holy Script. He is like a religious fundamentalist for whom every word of the scriptures is true because they are God's words. For the fundamentalist, truth depends upon the infallibility of the Source, upon the identity of the Author, and not on how well a particular body of theory happens to work in practice. This is exactly Gwala's approach. Attacking those whom he considers to be today's "revisionists" he argues "they come up with an alarming statement that Marx, Engels and Lenin were often wrong. In other words they are trying to repudiate the scientific basis of Marxism-Leninism".

The scientific basis of Marxism-Leninism does not rest on the infallibility of three outstanding personalities. Marx, Engels and Lenin certainly never claimed to be infallible. They argued strongly that knowledge is always relative. It is always an approximation to reality. It is, at best, always more or less true. The history of the sciences is a history of constant struggle to deepen and extend knowledge.

If we treat Marxism-Leninism seriously as a science, then we are also able to treat Lenin seriously - Lenin the revolutionary, not Lenin the Statue, not Lenin of the few select quotations.

Precisely because Marxism is a science,

not a dogma, precisely because Lenin was a revolutionary materialist, not a religious fundamentalist, his own theoretical writings and speeches are alive with developments, reformulations and even contradictions. Lenin constantly *revised* many of his own perspectives - yes, the very first "revisionist" of Leninism was often Lenin himself!

This could not be clearer than in regard to the question that is at the very centre of Gwala's intervention - Lenin's theory of the vanguard party.

Lenin and the vanguard party

"Our Party has stagnated while working underground... it has been suffocating underground during the last few years. The 'underground' is breaking up. Forward, then, more boldly; take up the new weapon, distribute it among new people, extend your bases, rally all the worker Social Democrats round yourselves, incorporate them in the ranks of the Party organisations by hundreds and thousands. Let their delegates put new life into the ranks of our central bodies, let the fresh spirit of young revolutionary Russia pour in through them... For this purpose, it is necessary for all comrades to devise *new* forms of organisation by their independent, creative joint efforts. It is impossible to lay down any predetermined standards for this, for we are working in an entirely new world. The new form of organisation, or

rather the new form of the basic organisational nucleus of the workers' party, must be definitely much broader than were the old circles. Apart from this, the new nucleus will most likely have to be a less rigid, more 'free', more 'loose' organisation. With complete freedom of association and civil liberties for the people..."

Who wrote this passage? Bernstein, Browder or Martov? Or any of the other "revisionists" on Gwala's black-list? *In fact, the passage was written by Lenin himself!* It comes from a pamphlet entitled "The Re-

organisation of the Party", and it was written in November 1905.¹

Now, we would fall into exactly the same dogmatism as Gwala, if we were to cast this particular passage (and others like it from the same period) in bronze and erect it into Lenin's final and incontestable word on the vanguard party. Lenin's views on the exact role and character of the party, and the related question of the relationship between revolutionary consciousness and mass struggle, were



'The scientific basis of Marxism-Leninism does not rest on the infallibility of three outstanding personalities'

never static.

It is possible to distinguish at least four basic and different views on this set of issues in the course of Lenin's writings:

I. In his first analyses of this area ("Draft Programme of the Social-Democratic Party", 1895), Lenin sees revolutionary working class consciousness emerging directly out of trade union struggle: "Thus the struggle of the factory workers against

the employers inevitably turns into a struggle against the entire capitalist class, against the entire social order based on the exploitation of labour by capital.”²

II. A few years later Lenin begins to shift very sharply from this perspective. This shift is crystallised in his famous work, *What Is to Be Done?* (1902), where he asserts the exact opposite: “We have said that there could not have been Social-Democratic consciousness among the workers. It would have to be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort is able to develop only trade-union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc. *The Theory of Socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical, and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals.*”³

Instead of a revolutionary, socialist consciousness emerging directly and inevitably out of trade union struggle, as Lenin had asserted in 1895, he now sees this consciousness as being brought to the working class from the outside by intellectuals of bourgeois and petty bourgeois origin. It is the latter perspective that determines his conception (in 1902) of the role and character of the party. It is essentially a tight-knit body of professional revolution-

ary *intellectuals* who bring the revolutionary line to the working class.

The character of such a party should be guided by its tight cadre policy: “The only serious organisational principle for the active workers of our movement should be the strictest secrecy, the strictest selection of members, and the training of professional revolutionaries.”⁴

In *What Is to Be Done?* it is the revolutionary professionalism and theoretical purity of the party membership, *not its class character*,

that is being stressed by Lenin (“the organisation of revolutionaries must consist first and foremost of people who make revolutionary activity their profession...*all distinctions between workers and intellectuals... must be effaced*”).⁵



‘Lenin’s views on the character of the party, and the relationship to mass struggle, were never static’

III. In 1905 Lenin’s approach was to shift dramatically once more. His earlier theses on the party were to be subjected to the criticism of events themselves. In

1905 the first Russian Revolution broke out with a mass working class uprising which led to the formation of revolutionary organs of people’s power (the soviets). Lenin was never a dogmatist. More rapidly than the other leading members of the Bolsheviks he realised the need to radically revise the perspectives of *What Is to Be Done?*.

Writing on the 1905 uprising and the formation of soviets he now recognises: “It was not some theory, not appeals on the part of someone, or tactics invented by

someone, not party doctrine, but the force of circumstances that led these non-party mass organs to realise the need for an uprising and transformed them into organs of an uprising."⁶ Lenin spares neither the party nor himself: "In December, we, the leaders of the Social-Democratic proletariat, were like a commander-in-chief who has deployed his troops in such an absurd way that most of them took no active part in the battle. The masses of the workers demanded, but failed to receive, instructions for resolute mass action."⁷

It was against *this* background that Lenin now began to call, as we have already seen, for the incorporation of workers "in the ranks of the Party by hundreds and thousands." It was now necessary, Lenin argued, for "the new nucleus...to be less rigid, more 'free', more 'loose'...With complete freedom of association and civil liberties..."⁸

In the years between 1905 and 1917 there were no major departures by Lenin from this broad perspective. In *State and Revolution* (1917) Lenin envisages a dictatorship of the proletariat in which the party is given no privileged political position. The working class directly and continually nominates, revokes and controls those delegated to run the state. At the beginning of 1919, at the Second All-Russia Trade Union Congress Lenin even argues: "But now, precisely now, especially after the political revolution, which has transferred power to the proletariat, the time has come for the trade unions, as the broadest organisation of the proletariat on a class scale, to play a very great role, to take the centre of the political stage, to become, in a sense, the chief political organ..."⁹ This is a far cry, indeed, from the position of *What Is to Be Done?*, where trade unions are seen as inherently narrow and economistic in

character.

IV. But a few months later, and in subsequent years there is another significant shift in Lenin's approach to the party. He returns to the 1902 theme of tightening up on admissions to the party. The industrial working class that had led the Russian revolution in 1917 had now virtually disappeared as a political and economic force. Civil war and foreign intervention had brought about an almost total collapse of industrial production (by 1920 it was at 13% of the pre-war period). On the other hand, the Bolshevik party was now a ruling party and therefore "it must be borne in mind that the temptation to join the ruling party at the present time is very great...there will be a big increase in the efforts of petty-bourgeois elements, and of elements positively hostile to all that is proletarian, to penetrate the Party."¹⁰

But unlike the 1902 position of *What Is to Be Done?*, Lenin is here concerned not, in the first instance with the *theoretical* purity or revolutionary *professionalism* of the party, but with its *class composition*. Lenin argues for a policy that makes it easier for workers, strictly defined, to qualify for membership than other strata ("we must without fail...define the term 'worker' in such a way as to include only those who have acquired a proletarian mentality from their very conditions of life. But this is impossible unless the persons concerned have worked in a factory for many years...")¹¹

What can we learn from this brief overview of Lenin's perspectives on the vanguard party?

- In the first place, it is absolutely ludicrous to lift a few quotations from a secondary source (as Gwala does from *The Short History of the CPSU* 1942 edition) and present these

as if they were some timeless, frozen Leninist theory of the party. Those who are so fond of invoking Lenin should at least take him seriously. They should read what he actually wrote and said.

- What Lenin says about the party is complex, shifting, sometimes contradictory. Lenin's ideas are not a dry formula that we can simply apply mechanically. But, precisely because they are complex, shifting and sometimes contradictory, Lenin's writings on the party are immensely more useful and challenging for us than any rigid, cut-and-dry formula.

- What Lenin has to say on the party must be firmly located within the particular historical and political moment that this or that intervention was made. The situation in Russia in 1895 was different from 1902, which was vastly different from 1905, and so on. This is not to say that there are no generally useful insights.

- But, in order to gain such insights, we need also to understand our own specific situation. Mechanical applications from Russia of 1902 to South Africa of 1991 have more to do with religious fundamentalism, than with Marxist materialism.

The SACP, the mass/vanguard debate

I cannot do full justice to this question here, but against the background of the above I would like to make a few basic observations.

In the first place "mass" and "vanguard"

are not alternative choices. "Mass" describes the CHARACTER of a party. "Vanguard" describes its ROLE. A party might be either "mass" in character, or it might be (as the SACP was in its underground years) a small formation of more or less professional revolutionaries.

Throughout the twists and turns of his theorising about the party, Lenin never ceased conceiving of it as a vanguard formation. But what character it should assume

in order to fulfill this role was something on which he changed his perspective, partly as a result of changing material conditions.

Thus, when in 1905 Lenin calls for a massive opening up of the party, for the admission of workers "by hundreds and thousands" (and he explicitly uses the term "mass party")¹² he is not abandoning the conception of the party as a vanguard. But the party Lenin had tried to build following the perspec-

tives of *What Is to Be Done?* had missed the boat in the 1905 uprising, its *character* needed to be changed, it needed to open its ranks to the thousands of militant workers thrown up in struggle, in order to better fulfill its vanguard function.

Of course, this means that the distinction I have made between the *role* of the party (its vanguard role) and its *character* (mass or highly selective, open or clandestine, based primarily on its theoretical purity or on its working class composition, etc.) is not itself a mechanical distinction. If you change the



'In a world in which socialist forces are generally on the retreat, the South African Communist Party is not!'

character of the party you are also probably changing the *way* in which you conceive that the party should fulfill its vanguard role.

Turning to the specific situation in South Africa and the 16 months since our launch. In July 1990 we launched the SACP as a legal formation under two main banners: "Build the workers' vanguard", and "Build the mass party".

We set ourselves the target of drawing in some 20-30 000 new members before our first congress. We said our membership should be a membership of *activists*, we were not interested in membership numbers for *their* own sake.

We said our members would have to be structured into functioning branches, we were not interested in a loose paper membership. We also said that in building basic party branches, districts and regions our prime target was to be the industrial working class.

What, briefly, was the background to this party building perspective? The SACP at the time of its unbanning in February 1990 enjoyed wide prestige amongst the militant working class and youth in our country.

But, organisationally, the party was extremely small. Inside the country it had developed relatively effective, but very small underground networks. The bulk of its membership was in exile - and this exile membership reflected the class and social character of the broader exile community. It was largely youth and intellectuals (it was they, after all, who had the mobility to go into exile). The social weight of the working class in our party was limited. In addition, the overwhelming majority of the exile membership was deployed full-time, as soldiers, administrators and diplomats, not in the party, but in the ANC.

The unbanning of the party also occurred, of course, against the background of nearly 18 years of sustained working class and mass popular struggles in our country. The militant trade unions and mass democratic formations had generated tens of thousands of relatively mature cadres, schooled in struggle..

Of course there were weaknesses and limitations, but I certainly do not share Gwala's elitist and aloof judgement on this generation of revolutionaries: "From 1976 there was a revolutionary upswing ... The youth was attracted to Marxism. Marxism-Leninism became the fashion. Unfortunately this revolutionary zeal was not matched by revolutionary theory. Most of these people were weak in theory and inexperienced in political organisation and therefore had only a vague, and for the most part incorrect, idea of Marxism..." Gwala, of course, inexcusably slides together 15 years of struggle. Because there were weaknesses in theory and organisational experience in 1976, he is arguing, we should be excluding from our party tens of thousands of working class and youth militants in 1991 lest we become contaminated!

Gwala wants to transform the SACP, not into a vanguard, but a rearguard, an inward facing cabal, desperately defending a dry and dusty dogma.

No doubt there is much still to be done within our party. We are confronting numerous challenges and difficulties. The SACP's independent profile and role, within the context of our alliance with the ANC and COSATU, certainly need to be sharpened.

There is a great deal of internal consolidation that must now occur. We need to continue our collective debate, deepening and pursuing our understanding of the

crisis in eastern Europe and of the socialist way forward.

But, as we approach our 8th Congress with a membership of over 20 000, with our strongest branches and districts in the industrial heartland of our country, the SACP is more of a working class party than it perhaps has ever been in its entire 70 year history.

It certainly has a considerably more working class character than it has ever had over the last 30 years. In a world in which socialist forces are generally on the retreat, WE are not.

After 16 months of open party building, the SACP is better poised than ever to fulfill its vanguard role in the unfolding South African revolution. ★

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The crucial role of the intelligentsia

Karl von Holdt

The question of whether or not a party is a vanguard party or a mass party is not primarily a question of numbers. It is a question of the character and role of the party.

Under the harsh conditions of apartheid repression, the SACP may have had no alternative to organising along the lines of a vanguard party.

But conditions have changed, and they have changed fundamentally. In the first place, the party is now legal and can organise in the open.

Secondly, the party is now establishing itself in the context of a society which is moving towards constitutional multiparty democracy. This means that there will be political pluralism and free political competition between different political parties, programmes and ideologies. This is a wholly new and different terrain for the party to operate on.

Thirdly, the party is facing these challenges in a historical moment when socialism is facing a profound and devastating crisis. It is simply not enough to say that we in South Africa are relatively untouched by the crisis, because the masses here still support socialism. What is it that the masses support? What is socialism, and what is the democratic socialism that the SACP talks about? And what strategic perspective do we have for getting there? These are the burning, unavoidable questions thrown up

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by the current crisis, in South Africa as in the rest of the world. And let us not bluff ourselves that the masses are not asking these questions as well.

Unless the SACP can begin to show that it is seriously debating these questions it will land up isolated, nostalgic and ineffectual. It will be totally unable to operate on the new terrain of public debate, political pluralism and democracy.

The need for a mass party

What implications does this new situation suggest for the role and character of the party?

I would say that it suggests very strongly the need for a mass party - not necessarily one with a massive membership, but one that is open, democratic and that is primarily geared to struggle for the hegemony of working class interests in society, rather than to overthrow the state by military insurrection.

By hegemony of working class interests, I mean the organisational and ideological leadership of the working class in public life, in the institutions of civil society and the state.

The concept of socialism has always been

central to any such project. Working class organisations have always put forward a socialist vision as the alternative to the capitalist order, and it is around this vision that they have organised the struggle for hegemony. But if you no longer know what socialism is, if socialism is facing a massive credibility crisis around the world, how can you organise the hegemony of the socialist project?

Thus the most urgent task facing the party is to open the debate about what socialism is, and how we might struggle towards it. Unless the party can begin to suggest answers and directions it will not be able to attract much support. It is perhaps because the party has hardly begun this task that so few intellectuals, or members of the intelligentsia more broadly, are joining it.

The party and the progressive intelligentsia

The intelligentsia are an extremely important layer in any society. As thinkers, teachers, lecturers, researchers, journalists, editors, students, church leaders, musicians, playwrights, lawyers, doctors, engineers, etc, they are enormously influential. They organise, create and shape knowledge, they interpret the world and they are central to the consciousness that a society has of itself. The intelligentsia are therefore a potent force in the struggle between contending political visions. Establishing support among the intelligentsia is a crucial part of any strategy to win hegemony.

There is a large progressive intelligentsia - black and white - in this country, supportive of the struggle for democracy, many of them sympathetic to the goals of socialism. They are located in the universities, the newspapers, the schools, the theatres, the churches. Not only are they important in

the struggle for influence, for hegemony, in society. They are also a crucial resource in the project of rethinking and redefining socialism.

We should be under no illusions. The task of rethinking and renovating socialism will require enormous theoretical, analytical and creative work. Intellectuals and other members of the intelligentsia will be essential for this work. If the party does not seek to engage and interact with such people, if it fails to win their support and sympathy, it will be cutting itself off from a tremendous resource for the renewal of socialism and the renewal of the party.

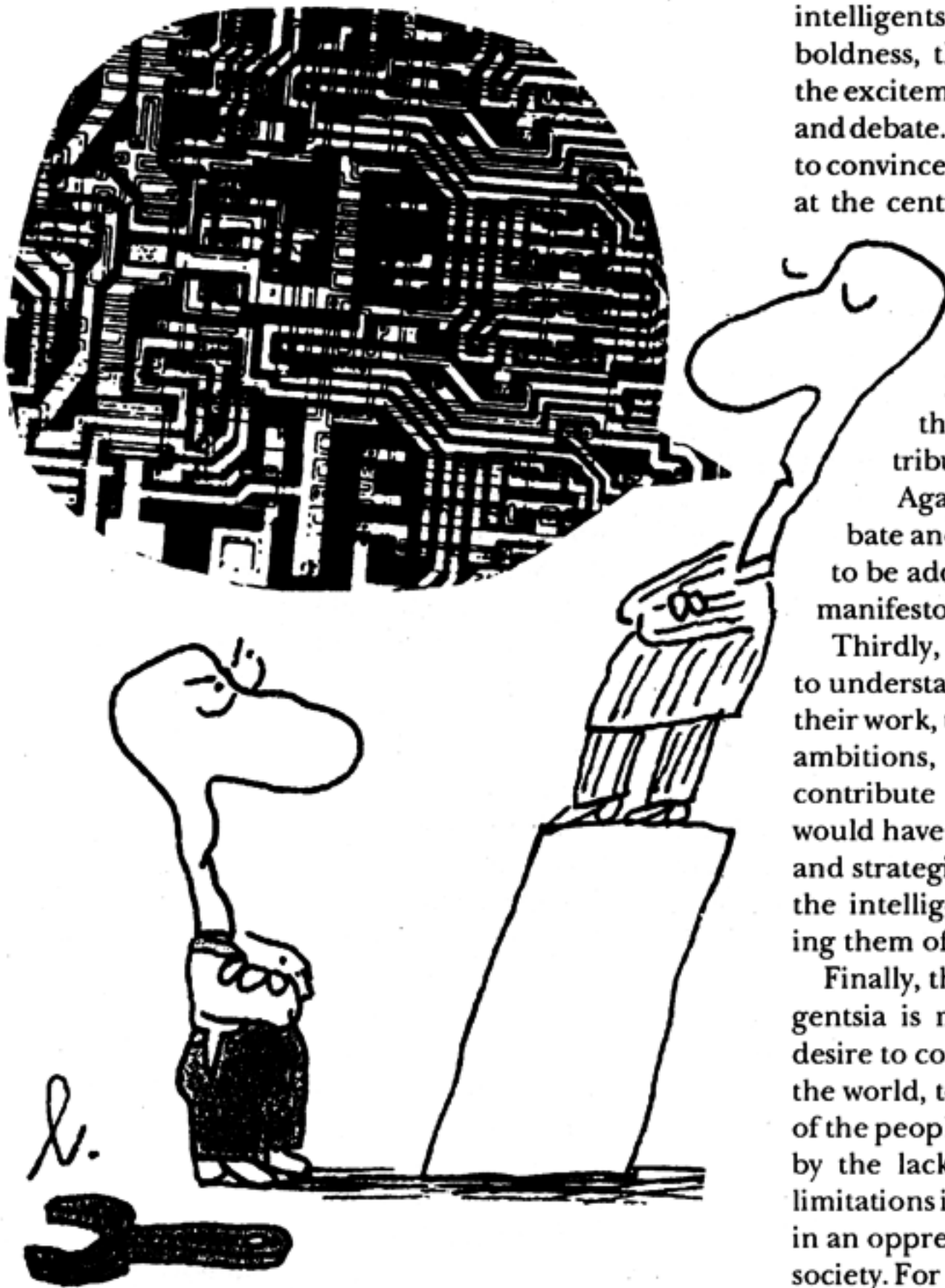
At the same time, the broader project of democratising SA society, and formulating and implementing development strategies, will require not only mass struggle, but enormous creative and intellectual effort on the part of the intelligentsia in many different arenas of society. If the party wants to be part of this process, have any influence on it, or learn from it, it will have to be located among the intelligentsia as well as the working class.

Yet the SACP has made very little effort to work among or win the support of such people. Indeed, the party's draft manifesto fails to even specify that this is an important task.

How then could the party begin to take up this important challenge?

In the first place, it would have to state in its manifesto that this is an important task and why it is so. It would have to dedicate itself and its membership to achieving it.

Secondly, the party would have to demonstrate that it is a party of debate, of creative thinking and serious analysis. It would have to acknowledge that the crisis of socialism is critical, and that the SACP itself is part of the crisis. It would have to



open up all the questions that trouble socialists and other progressives. In other words, it would have to pursue the questions posed by Cde Slovo in his courageous contribution, *Has socialism failed?*, as well as questions that have not yet been posed.

It would have to attract the progressive

intelligentsia through the very boldness, the high quality, and the excitement of its questioning and debate. Indeed, it would have to convince them that the party is at the centre of progressive debate and analysis. And it will have to convince the intelligentsia that they have a role to play in the debate, a vital contribution to make.

Again, the issue of debate and analysis would have to be addressed in the party's manifesto.

Thirdly, the party would have to understand the intelligentsia, their work, their frustrations and ambitions, their aspirations to contribute to a better world. It would have to work out activities and strategies for engaging with the intelligentsia, and persuading them of the above points.

Finally, the progressive intelligentsia is motivated by a deep desire to contribute to changing the world, to improving the lives of the people. It is also frustrated by the lack of democracy and limitations it finds in its own work in an oppressive and exploitative society. For example, progressive journalists are frustrated by the

way they are forced to report on events in the world; progressive university lecturers are frustrated by the conservative forces that control universities; progressive doctors, lawyers, engineers often experience similar obstacles to being fully productive and creative in their work.

In short, the progressive intelligentsia desires to contribute both to transforming society, and it desires to transform its own working situation.

The party needs to demonstrate that it is a valid and powerful vehicle for contributing to *both* transformations: that through the party the intelligentsia can contribute to transforming society, *and* that the party can help transform their own work and the institutions where they work.

The mass party: forging the unity of masses and intelligentsia

But doesn't this emphasis on the intelligentsia mean building a new type of vanguard party based on an elite of intellectuals far removed from the masses?

No it does not. A party which appeals to the progressive intelligentsia is not an elitist vanguard party if at the same time it is rooted in a powerful mass base. In fact, its appeal to the intelligentsia would depend on its ability to show that it has a large, politically conscious and militant working class membership.

It should be a forum for interaction and mutual intellectual, cultural and political enrichment of working class members and members from the intelligentsia. Without the mass movement of the working people the intelligentsia will be powerless to transform the world. But without the intelligentsia the working class too will be unable to build a better society. Thus the party should forge the unity of these different forces.

In short, while the party must base itself

in the working class, it is equally true that it must appeal to and root itself among the progressive intelligentsia. Unless it does this, the party will not be able to develop into a powerful mass party. It will be limited in its ability to influence society, it will be unable to renew socialist theory and practice as well as the party itself, and it will deny the working class the possibility of transforming the world.

The kind of party I am describing would hold within itself a broad range of left-wing, socialist views. It would be a party of lively, vibrant and serious debate and political work. In this it would be very different from the 'Marxist-Leninist vanguard party'. Winning the support and participation of a broad section of the intelligentsia is essential for building such a party. Building a vanguard party would drive most of the intelligentsia away, because of its need for a narrow political line and authoritarianism.

It is not a vanguard project because, by becoming rooted among the intelligentsia, the party would have the resources to struggle for hegemony in a democratic, pluralist political terrain. This is a crucial aspect of building the party as a moral-political force with broad influence and support in different sectors of society.

In this article I have tried to show that if it wishes to make a political impact in SA, the SACP will have to become a mass party. And, crucially, I argue that if it wishes to become a mass party it will have to take extremely seriously the need to engage with and win support among the progressive intelligentsia. ★

A brief history of the programmes of the SACP

Max Ozinsky

The founding conference of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) was held from 30 July to 1 August 1921 in Cape Town. The conference adopted a manifesto which was an "appeal to all South African workers, organised and unorganised, white and black, to join in promoting the overthrow of the capitalist system and outlawry of the capitalist class, and the establishment of a Commonwealth of Workers throughout the world."

Outlining briefly, in one page, the control of state power by the capitalist class, it states that the task of the "Labour Movement" is to overthrow this system and institute a new socialist order. It says that the Russian workers in the Great October Socialist Revolution had given the lead on this issue. The manifesto attacks the existing reformist leadership of the labour movement. It says that the immediate and main duty of the moment is to establish the closest contact with the workers of all ranks and races and to propagate the communist gospel amongst them.

The manifesto goes on to say that the task of the CPSA is not only propaganda, but also to "guide and inspire the struggling workers...(and) generally act as the revolutionary vanguard of the labour army of South Africa."

After the founding conference of the

Our 8th congress will be debating a new party manifesto, "Building workers' power for democratic change". The new manifesto is part of a long communist tradition in our country.

Max Ozinsky looks at the forerunners of our new manifesto.



CPSA a number of other manifestos were issued by the party. For instance, "The fight to the finish" was a manifesto issued to the striking workers of the Witwatersrand on 30 January 1922, during the Rand Revolt. There is also an election manifesto in May 1924, for the white general election of that year, calling for the defeat of the "Capitalist gang, the Smuts government".

From the content of these documents it can be seen that in those days the party made a sharp distinction between manifestos (which were more like agitational pamphlets) and a party programme. In fact, the first draft party programme only appears at the end of 1924, although there is mention of the 2nd Congress in 1923 adopting a "Party Constitution and Platform" for submission to the Comintern.

These early manifestos were appeals, calls

to action from the party. Is there any difference between a manifesto and a programme? It is perhaps just a matter of words. But there is something of a tradition in which a manifesto is seen as less analytical than a programme. Lenin appears to have observed this distinction. For instance during a debate on the party programme at the 8th Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) in 1919, Lenin argued:

"We educated the party of the proletariat with the aid of the Marxist programme, and the tens of millions of working people in our country must be educated in the same way... This cannot be done by means of a manifesto. The manifesto of the Third International is an appeal, a proclamation, it calls attention to the tasks that confront us, it is an appeal to the people's sentiments. Take the trouble to prove scientifically that you have an economic basis, that you are not building on sand. If you cannot do that, do not undertake to draw up a programme." (*Selected Works*, volume 3, p135)

The December 1924 CPSA conference adopted a draft programme for discussion by the branches. The draft is short, less than four pages long with the following headings: Capitalism and Socialism, the Class Struggle, The Communist Party and its tasks in South Africa, and Present Demands. It is not clear when this programme was formally adopted by the party.

1929: Native Republic

The next programme seems to have been a new party programme adopted at the 7th annual conference of the CPSA on 1 January 1929. This conference was one of the most crucial for the party. It followed after the 6th congress of the Communist International had outlined the Native Republic slogan for the CPSA. The Native Republic

slogan set the immediate task of the party as the self-determination of the African peoples, that is their complete liberation from imperialist as well as feudal rule and oppression. In other words, the party was to fight for national liberation of the African oppressed. This programme is seven pages long, with just under half of it being a list of "particular demands". The first section of the programme is mainly a discussion of the relationship between national oppression and class exploitation.

1944: Scientific socialism

The next programme seems to have been adopted at the January 1944 national conference held in Johannesburg. This conference adopted a new programme and constitution which remained in force until the dissolution of the party in 1950. The 1944 programme is very brief, about three pages long and mainly in point form. It contains no theoretical analysis, except to say that the party is based on the principle of scientific socialism and is guided by the theory and experience of the international labour movement. It then sets out demands in point form under six headings such as: Political rights, Economic rights, Workers rights, etc. It does not set out how to achieve these rights.

1962: The Road to South African Freedom

"The Road to South African Freedom" (RSAF) was adopted as the SACP programme at the 5th conference of the SACP, held underground inside the country in 1962. This programme, RSAF, is the first that contains a detailed and theoretically grounded analysis of South Africa. As it says in its introduction: "In this programme the SACP states its fundamental principles. It

surveys the vast changes which are transforming the world and the continent we live in. It analyses the historical roots and the underlying realities of South African society. It puts forward its answers to the problems facing the people of our country today."

RSAF marks a number of changes in the outlook of the party. The programme bases the SACP as a party of the African continent. It has a long section on the "African Revolution", which discusses the break up of the colonial system in Africa. It says that "the struggle of the peoples of the rest of Africa and those of South Africa against colonialism and for freedom are one and indivisible."

The 1962 programme also outlines the theory of Colonialism of a Special Type (CST) clearly and as a whole for the first time. Today we can say in retrospect that there are a number of problems in the way in which the RSAF outlines CST. For instance, it talks about the level of "white South Africa" which has the features of an advanced capitalist state; and the level of "Non-White South Africa" which has the features of a colony. The programme seems to imply that black and white South Africa are totally separated physically. This is an analogy which does not take into account how intertwined the colonial bloc and the colonised are in reality. Every day millions of colonised black workers actually work in factories owned and run by the white colonialists.

Many of these kinds of problems are corrected in the 1989 party programme. However, the great importance of the RSAF

is that it presents CST in a generally well argued way, based on a class analysis of our society. Even twenty years after it was adopted, in the early 1980s when the party was again rebuilding its influence in the mass movement, we were able to use that programme in our propaganda work to win support for the SACP.

The RSAF is also the first programme of the party to explicitly state that it "unreservedly supports and participates in the struggle for national liberation headed by the ANC". It calls, together with the ANC, for the summoning of a sovereign national

convention to draw up a new convention.

The programme also, for the first time, raises the question of armed struggle. Armed struggle is not dealt with as a strategy for the seizure of power, but rather as a form of defence against the attacks of the regime. The discussion of armed struggle is very brief, and it pains to point out that the party does not reject "all non-violent methods of struggle as use-

less". It advocates the use of all forms of struggle by the people. It does, however, say that white minority rule will crumble "before the reality of an armed and determined people. The crisis of the ruling classes will deepen and the possibility would be opened of a peaceful and negotiated transfer of power". But it is not totally sure about this because it says that "whether its end is brought about through such a peaceful transition or by insurrection, the vicious type of colonialism embodied in the present Republic of South Africa cannot long endure."



The Road to South African Freedom also raises the question of armed struggle

The RSAF then makes a number of fairly detailed immediate proposals of the party on questions such as state structure, civil rights, economic development, etc.

1989: The Path to Power

A new programme of the SACP, "The Path to Power", was adopted in 1989 at its 7th Congress. The process of preparing and drafting the programme was a long one. The 1987 plenary session of the central committee established a constitution commission. The commission first asked all party units to look at the 1962 programme and submit recommendations on what the programme should contain. These proposals were collected by the commission and a draft was prepared on the basis of them. The draft was then circulated for discussions in the party units. About 1250 amendments, suggestions and additions came from the units which dealt with questions of formulation, emphasis, omissions, style and additions. As Joe Slovo said when introducing the discussion on the draft programme at the congress: "In a sense we can truly claim that the draft before you is an attempt to express the collective thinking of our whole membership."

There are three major developments in "The Path to Power" compared to the 1962 programme. Firstly, the analysis of CST is much tighter and more rigorous. Secondly, the programme contains a very clear outline of the vanguard role of the party in the national liberation struggle. There is a whole chapter on this question which stresses the particular contribution that the party should

be making to the liberation struggle. Thirdly, and most importantly for the party in 1989, the programme provides a clearly defined path to the seizure of power - through insurrectionary organisation. The programme does not see this in isolation. It states quite clearly and in bold letters that "armed struggle cannot be counterposed with dialogue, negotiation and justifiable compromise, as if they were mutually exclusive categories". It goes on to say that "whether there is an armed seizure of power or a negotiated settlement, what is indisputable to both is the development of the political and military forces of the revolution."

Some comrades have criticised the programme for not predicting that the regime would enter into negotiations with the ANC.

It has been argued that this shows that the party failed in its task when drawing up "The Path to Power". This seems to be a harsh criticism. At the time that "The Path to Power" was drawn up the demand from the ground was

for a clear guide to action, not predictions about what the moves of the enemy might be.

A programme can only be general, based on what is concrete, what we actually know.

In discussing the new draft manifesto, "Building workers' power for democratic change", it is necessary to get a deeper understanding of how the political situation has changed since 1989.

Now, in much easier circumstances, when we can meet and discuss openly, we must have openness and maximum participation by all comrades. ★



**The Path to Power
contains a very
clear outline of the
vanguard role of
the party**

Green communists?

'The Stellenbosch Comrades'

The environment is something which cannot be ignored by an organisation representing workers' interests - this is the argument of this discussion article by a collective signing itself 'The Stellenbosch Comrades'

Internationally, unprecedented attention is being given to environmental matters. On the one hand, people are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that the very existence of the human race may become dependent on environmental protection. On the other hand, there is a growing recognition that all people have a right to a clean and healthy environment.

A perception exists that concern for the environment is the exclusive preserve of the idle rich. This could be ascribed to two factors. It is primarily the rich who appear to benefit from environmental conservation (they can afford to visit game parks). And big business has eagerly jumped on to the green bandwagon in its attempt to use environmental awareness as a sales mechanism.



However, the reality is that ordinary working people and the poor have the most direct interest in a healthy environment. It is they who are the immediate and defenceless victims of environmental degradation.

Apartheid has forced the majority of our people to live in dirty and ugly townships where little provision is made for effective disposal of rubbish and sewage. Many of our people live amongst filth and are exposed to diseases caused by such poor sanitary conditions. The problem is worsened by the absence of clean and accessible

running water in large parts of the country.

Although Eskom produces 60% of Africa's electricity, about 70% of South Africans do not enjoy the benefits of household electricity. Instead, their energy needs must be fulfilled by cutting down trees (a time-consuming and ecologically destructive exercise), or by using paraffin (a dirty and expensive alternative to electricity). Shack dwellers dependent on wood or paraffin live with the ever-present danger of fires. Yet, the government subsidises the electrification of distant white farms.

Although the majority has no electricity, they also suffer the consequences of the pollution caused by Eskom's coal-burning power stations. Renewable energy sources (for instance, wind, water and sun) are viable alternatives, but the government and Eskom still regard nuclear power as a solution, despite its dangers. Clearly, no threat to Eskom's monopoly will be allowed.

Toxic waste and other harmful substances constitute a major threat to a healthy environment. Factory and transport workers who have to handle these substances, and farm workers who have to spray crops and trees with pesticides, are most vulnerable to this danger. Employers do little to provide adequate protection for these workers and existing legislation does not ensure safe working conditions.

The bantustan system has virtually destroyed the ecology of many rural areas. Here people's livelihood is being affected by soil deterioration, caused largely by un-

equal land distribution. Already in 1980, 46% of the Ciskei's soil was badly eroded. Corrupt bantustan regimes import toxic waste to pay for their repressive armies and police forces. Also, many rural people have been pushed off their land to make way for nature reserves from which they derive no benefit.

Capital's "concern" for the environment is somewhat ironic considering that many environmental problems are caused by the capitalist system. The following are four areas where this is clear:

- **The profit motive.** The capitalist frame of mind, which puts profit above all else, relegates the environment to the status of a secondary concern. Capitalism's continued existence depends on never-ending growth and expansion, which require increasing exploitation of limited resources.

- **Extremes of wealth and poverty.** The capitalist world economy has created underdeveloped countries which are poor and often have to abandon long-term economic and environmental plan-

ning in their struggle for short-term survival. Capitalism also means that wealth is unequally distributed between the rich elite and the poor masses. The poor often have to live in squatter settlements, where scarcity of space and absence of electricity lead to the removal of vegetation, which in turn leaves the land vulnerable to soil erosion and floods. This is why the poor are almost always affected most by natural disasters.



Big business eagerly jumped onto the green bandwagon as a sales mechanism

Capitalism does not have the capacity to reduce (let alone eliminate) poverty. Indeed, poverty has increased both in absolute and relative terms under the international capitalist regime.

• **Capitalist mining in SA.** The mining industry, for long the back-bone of South Africa's capitalist economy, is a major threat to environmental quality and human health. Gold and coal mining cause high levels of acid, mercury, cyanide and arsenic to contaminate soil and water, posing a danger to human, animal and plant life. Abandoned asbestos dumps cause lung cancer and asbestosis.

• **Consumerism and the motor car.** Capitalism is based on growing consumerism, which encourages people to buy more and more things, thus further exhausting natural resources and causing more pollution (both in production and packaging processes). Consumerism is glamourised by an advertising industry whose sole purpose is to persuade people to buy things, irrespective of whether they need or can afford them, and regardless of the detrimental consequences.

In particular, capitalist consumer society has made the privately owned motor car a status symbol, at the expense of decent and affordable public transport. But motor cars are harmful in many ways - leaded petrol causes brain damage and abnormal devel-

opment in unborn babies. Exhaust emissions cause photochemical smog which affects people's eyes, noses and lungs.

Since capitalism is a major cause of environmental problems, it disqualifies itself as a possible solution to these problems. Of course, it would be naive to think that this implies that socialism is the panacea for all environmental problems. Some of the former "socialist" states have been equally guilty of environmental destruction. Perhaps this could be seen as partly the result of the growth of power relations which alienated the rulers from the ruled in these countries.

However, a democratic socialism based on the grassroots needs of ordinary people (something which capitalism could never be because it requires undemocratic power structures to promote the interests of the ruling elite) could provide the framework for harmonious co-existence between humans and their natural environment.

This is why it is essential that organisations representing the workers, the poor and the unemployed be at the forefront of the struggle for the democratisation of water, energy and other natural resources. While we build an ecologically sane society, let us remember the words of Marx: "That human life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself, for humans are part of nature." ★

In their own words...

SOCIALIST CRIMES? "When (Polish) Prime Minister...Bielecki visited the sprawling Azoty chemical works, what he saw chilled him to his free-market bones... 'It still conducts functions so typical for a socialist enterprise', Mr Bielecki lamented. 'They have an indoor skating rink, a very nice swimming pool, culture centre, soft-drink bottling plant and a very nice laundry. They maintain 1000 free factory apartments, heat 80 percent of the town and still make a profit.' - *International Herald Tribune*.

Religious identity and revolutionary commitment

Charles Villa-Vicencio

Is there religion after Marx? A quick response: On this side of utopia, 'Yes' - as a persisting, escapist social illusion, says Marx. With the dawning of the socialist utopia, the answer is, 'No', he continues. It will simply wither away, because there will be no reason for it to exist. Are these conclusions a necessary part of Marx's understanding of social reality? The answer is 'Yes, but...' A final question: Is there a place for a revolutionary understanding of religion in a contemporary reading of Marx?

I shall: (a) Show why Marx came to regard religion as the opium of the people, accepting that religion has historically often (usually) exercised this function in society. (b) Argue that religion, in terms of Marx's own social theory, is not necessarily oppressive or a form of illusionary, social escapism. (c) Contend that it is important for Marxists to rediscover the revolutionary potential of religious belief, not merely as a tactical move to lure religious people into the social revolution; but because religion gives expression to an understanding of reality without which the social revolution cannot succeed.

The argument that follows presupposes a pragmatic and critical approach to the reading of Marx. Recent events in Eastern Europe constitute an historical reality to which theorists are compelled to respond.

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The underlying vision of the Marxian enterprise, which is to *change* society rather than merely to understand it (or to legitimate any particular ideological understanding of it), at the same time remains the motivating intent of what follows.

Marx's Understanding of Religion

Marx's critique of religion was essentially taken over from Ludwig Feuerbach, whose rejection of religion the young Marx accepted as the final word on the matter. "For Germany," Marx wrote, "the criticism of religion has been largely completed; and criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism..."¹ Although critical of Feuerbach in other areas, Marx accepted destruction of belief in God as the first step toward the criticism of the economic ills of capitalism. Only when people stop depending on God, and accept responsibility for shaping the character of society, he argued, could the social revolution begin. Why does Marx come to this conclusion?

i. For Marx religion is a human creation. "The basis of irreligious criticism," said Marx, "is this: *man makes religion*; religion

does not make man.”² He saw God as no more than a fictitious being created by people unable and unwilling to take responsibility for their own suffering; no more than a naive human creation, intended to enable people to deal with the fears and disappointments which characterise human life. To fail to recognise this function (dys-function) of ‘God’ in history, was for Marx to acquiesce to human suffering and to accept the exploitation of society - which, he insisted, was within the capacity of humankind to change. More specifically, he argued, it is the proletariat (who have nothing to lose) who contain this capacity for change. All other classes have enough to lose to render them less capable of being major agents of change.

ii. Religion, in other words, is an illusion. As finite beings, people experience insecurity and a sense of vulnerability. The reality of death promises extinction and personal defeat. The response to this situation, has been the projection or creation of an all-powerful, unlimited and eternal being who is expected to come to humankind’s aid - a God who symbolises all the powers and virtues to which humankind aspires, but fails to appropriate for itself.

In brief, Marx found Feuerbach’s notion of humanity projecting its hopes and fears away from itself, an explanation for religion and ethical quietism. Having projected its internal quest for personal and social fulfilment to the level of reality itself, this projection acquires an objectivity of its own, which impinges back onto humanity. The outcome is people entrapped in passivity, unable to deal effectively with their anxieties and hope for a better world. “Man - this is the mystery of religion - projects his being into objectivity, and then again makes himself an object of this projected image of

himself, thus converted into a subject.”³

Believers may come to experience a sense of security as a result of this illusion. The problem is that this false security is ultimately destructive of the latent human potential which lies below the very insecurity that drives humankind to create an all-powerful divine being in the first place. If the very qualities after which humankind hankers are projected onto God, the outcome is a denigration of humankind. People are left in submission, deprived of their full humanity.

The illusion is a destructive illusion. It undermines the positive resources of humanity and the potential of people to rise above their personal and social alienation. Seen in this way, Marx’s exposure of the illusionary character of religion liberates and emancipates those who have divested themselves of their power by giving it to God. To recognise the illusion is a first step whereby the victims of the existing social order can take charge of their own lives. Religion, says Marx, “is the *fantastic realisation* of the human being inasmuch as the human being possesses no true reality” - because this reality has been projected into the heavens. “The struggle against religion is, therefore, indirectly a struggle against *that world* whose spiritual *aroma* is religion.”⁴

iii. “The criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism.”⁵ Marx saw in Feuerbach’s criticism of religion an instrument for wider use. His concern was the rejection of Hegel’s idealism, within which the human ideas about life are objectified as absolute spirit from where they act back onto human history, controlling the thought and behaviour of people. The Christian religion was central to Hegel’s system. It was a dominant part of nineteenth century Prussian ruling

class ideology. Marx, in turn, encountered Feuerbach's critique of Hegel in Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*. Given this situation it was inevitable that Marx would begin his critical social theory with a critique of religion. He at the same time showed little interest in religion *per se*, and never engaged in a scientific study of religion.

This historical context which contributed to Marx's rejection of religion is important. It should not, however, cause us to lose sight of the important insights into religion which Marx provides. Put differently: "It is necessary", suggests Alistair Kee "to distinguish between the central place which critical thinking about religion played in the development of his work generally and the minor and peripheral place which criticising religion occupied in his life."⁶ Starting with a critique of religion, Marx set about subjecting all social institutions and ideologies to an historical materialist critique. In so doing he never chose in any serious manner to enquire whether religion could fulfill anything other than an oppressive/illusionary function in society.

iv. "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas."⁷ Given the illusionary character of religion in Marxian thought, the inevitable question is who is responsible for the illusion and whose interests are thereby served? It has already been suggested that humanity as a whole shares in the creation of religious answers to the problem of finitude. For Marx, however, class factors operate at every level of human existence, which means that as the dominant classes control material and economic resources of society, so they also control intellectual ideas within society. These ideas are not left unchallenged by the under classes, but given the material

and structural resources of the the ruling class which, for example, controls the media and dominates leadership positions, it is the ideas of the dominant classes which are dominant. Religious ideas and symbols are subject to the same process. In religion as in all other areas of thought, the ideas, values and interests of the ruling classes dominate.

v. "Religion (then) is the opium of the people."⁸ It is an escape from the harshness of life. To the extent that it is shaped and influenced by the dominant classes, it is an exercise in misdirecting the attention of the under classes away from the socio-economic causes of their misery to the empty or non-existent heavens. Together with the other nineteenth century 'Masters of Suspicion', Marx saw the criticism of religion as a ground clearing exercise which would enable people to give their attention to social revolution. In the words of Freud, the social ills of society could only be cured by the victims of religious neurosis "withdrawing their expectations from the other world and concentrating their liberated energies into life on earth."⁹

vi. Religion is at the same time "an *expression* of real suffering and a *protest* against real suffering." It is "the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions."¹⁰ Religion is, in other words, a recognition that the world is flawed and in need of change. It is a cry for deliverance. It is here that those interested in religion must focus their attention, further expanding on the Marxian notion of religion as protest. Religion, for Marx, is a balm, a narcotic and a cry for help. It provides a false security. As such it needs to be destroyed in order that true healing may come. To the extent, however, that it is also a

"protest against real suffering", the simple dismissal or destruction of religion is not necessarily the only feasible revolutionary response to religion. History shows that religious protest can be elevated to the level of rebellion and revolution. To this perception of religion we return.

In summation: Marx's views on religion contain little advance on the standard atheistic critique of the time. He showed no apparent interest in the question of God, concluding with Feuerbach that this question had "no longer any interest for the intellect."¹¹ He nevertheless offers a subtle critique of Feuerbach.

In agreeing with Feuerbach that people are changed as a consequence of changed circumstances, he argues that Feuerbach "forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that it is essential to educate the educator."¹² The implication is a more positive (and dialectical) attitude towards such intellectual and cultural resources which play a role in shaping the attitudes and actions of people. In so doing Marx seems to allow (theoretically) that religion, as an ingredient of culture, can be part of this cultural instrument for change.

Showing little interest in religion, Marx does not develop this possibility regarding religion. His interest in religion was solely with regard to the social function it fulfilled in an oppressive nineteenth century European capitalist society.

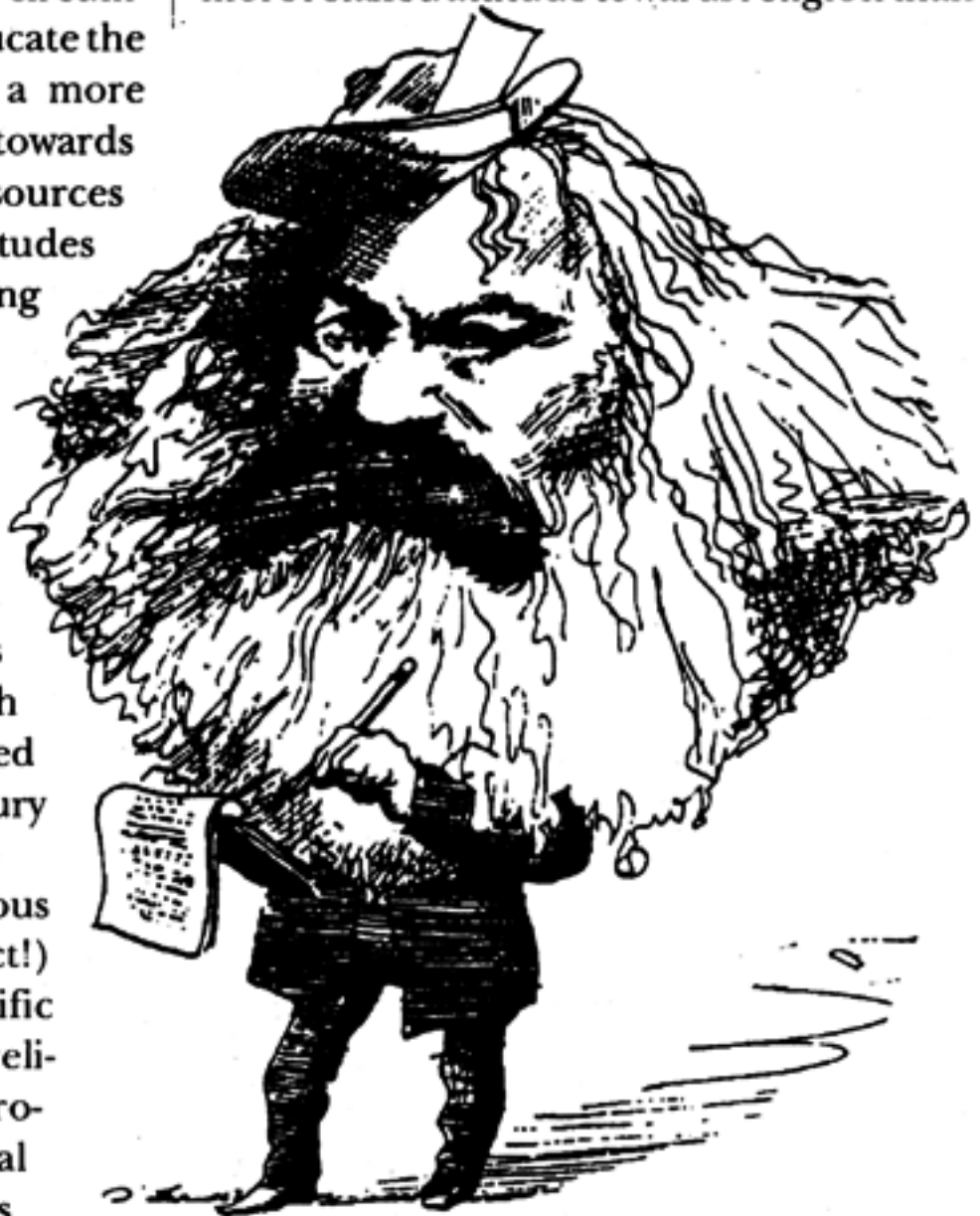
Yet even at this level his religious judgment (although largely correct!) was not based on the kind of scientific analysis of concrete social data on religion, which he so adamantly promoted in all other areas of social analysis. It is this that persuades

Charles Davis that his "theory of religion is asserted with a metaphysical absoluteness" which contradicts the very historical materialism which he seeks to promote. To quote Davis: "His account of religion is self-contradictory, in as much as it rejects religion on the grounds that religion is pure theory independent of practice, but does so in a purely theoretical manner, disallowing the possible modification of the rejection of future practice."¹³

It is this that poses the question whether (Marxian) historical materialism necessarily renders religion no more than an escapist social illusion?

More than Opium

In his later years Marx was ready to adopt a more relaxed attitude towards religion than



was the case at the time of his earlier writings. Asked about religion in an interview in 1871, he seemed to suggest that the question of belief was a personal matter rather than a prerequisite for accepting historical materialism. "On that point I cannot speak in the name of the society (the International). I myself am an atheist."¹⁴ Even at the height of his polemic against the religion of the state, he remained intrigued with the attitude of the early Christians to life. "They lost", he suggested, "their chance of the kingdom of heaven on earth because they rejected and neglected (revolutionary) action" - an observation which confirms Marx's recognition that religion, for all its failures, gives expression to the cries and hopes of the oppressed.¹⁵ To this extent at least, religion must be taken seriously.

Marx was not a scholar of religion and many of his presuppositions about Judeo-Christian tradition were wrong.¹⁶ His essential critique of this tradition nevertheless strikes at the heart of religion and ought to be taken more seriously by religious people. "Let us not search for the secret of the Jews in religion", he observed, "but for the secret of their religion in the living Jews..."¹⁷ For Marx the truth of any religion is to be found in praxis, not in the theoretical truth which its adherents proclaim. The question to be considered is whether these more tolerant and yet critical comments on religion should be taken as mere "asides" or as indications of there being space within the *theoretical framework* of his thought for a more positive attitude towards religion?

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Per Frostin suggests the latter.¹⁸ Combining Marx's later writings for any hints of a properly scientific critique of religion, he identifies what he calls "the forgotten text in *Das Kapital*" which is a long footnote in Chapter 13 of Volume 1:

"Darwin has interested us in the history of nature's technology, i.e. in the formation of the organs of plants and animals, which organs serve as instruments of production for sustaining life. Does not the history of the productive organs of man, of organs that are the material basis of all social organisation, deserve equal attention? And would not such a history be easier to compile, since, as Vico says, human history differs from natural history in this, that we have made the former, but not the latter? Technology discloses man's mode of dealing with nature, the process of production by which he sustains his life, and thereby also lays bare the mode of formation of his social relations, and of the mental conceptions that flow from them."

Marx then applies this principle to the history of religion, in what Frostin shows is the only place where the later Marx deals with the principles and methodology of the critique of religion:

"Every history of religion that fails to take account of this material base, is uncritical. It is, in reality, much easier to discover by analysis the earthly core of the misty creations of religion, than conversely, it is, to develop from the actual relations of life corresponding celestialised forms of those relations. The latter method is the only

materialistic, and therefore only scientific one. The weak points in the abstract materialism of natural science, a materialism that excludes history and its process, are at once evident from the abstract and ideological conceptions of its spokesmen, whenever they venture beyond the bounds of their own specificity." ¹⁹

Marx here recognises the need for a study of religion to begin with an analysis of the concrete material conditions of life, at a particular time and place, that gives rise to such celestial symbols and ideals that form part of a particular religion. Marx, in fact, by implication dismisses any sweeping, abstract rejection of all religion as necessarily illusory and oppressive, as uncritical, unmaterialistic and unscientific. *In so doing he provides a historical-materialist critique of his own better known, popular rejection of religion.*

In brief Marx allows for the critique of religion to be seen as merely a particular instance of the critique of ideology. Davis reminds us that "ideology for Marx was a set of general statements held and proclaimed in isolation from their historical basis."²⁰ The purpose of a Marxian critique of ideology is thus not necessarily to prove a particular ideology to be false, but rather to uncover the hidden historical basis which gave rise to that ideology in the first place. A consequence of this is the relativising of all ideologies but, again by implication, also the recognition of the possibility that some revolutionary situations may give expression to a religious ideology that promotes revolution. Marx seemed, in fact, to recognise an instance of this kind of religion in, for example, early Christianity. His criticism of early Christians is primarily that they failed to translate their revolutionary ideals into practice.

History provides us with numerous ex-

amples of revolutionary religious movements, not least of all the peasant's revolts of the sixteenth century which formed part of the Protestant Reformation (attracting the attention of both Marx and Engels), within which an attempt was made to translate religiously transmitted ideas into revolutionary practice. Latin American liberation theology and other contextual theologies to have emerged from within the experience of the oppressed, in turn, provide ample contemporary examples of religion that can scarcely be described as the opium of the people - a notion which Lenin insisted was "the cornerstone of the whole Marxist outlook on religion." ²¹

Indeed few third world Marxist revolutionary leaders (from Fidel Castro to Daniel Ortega) would agree with Lenin that Marxism is *required* to be "relentlessly hostile to religion."

Lenin proclaimed: "We must combat religion - that is the ABC of *all* materialism, and consequently of Marxism." ²² Some doctrinaire Marxists (and armchair academics) still cling to such views, while few Marxists engaged in actual revolutionary politics take such counsel too seriously.

Recognising that religion has in certain situations been a carrier of revolutionary ideas, it is further noted that scholars in the neo-Marxist tradition recognise that while ideology (and religion) may be a reflection or mystification of material reality, it can acquire a relatively autonomous identity of its own, giving rise to ideological struggles which shape people's political perceptions and allegiances.

Emphasising the dialectical relationship between the material base and the realm of ideas (present but sometimes latently so in Marx's writings), Althusser, Nico Poulantzas, Antonio Gramsci and others,

argue that ideology impinges back onto the material base, becoming part of the revolutionary process.

Marx would, in his own way, concur. While stressing that "material force can only be overthrown by material force", he recognised that "theory itself becomes a material force when it is seized by the masses."²³

In brief, it has been argued that Marxian theory allows for religion to function as more than the opium of the people. And to the extent that popular proletarian culture in South Africa is at least partly religious, revolutionary ideas may in certain sections of this society only become a material force to the extent that it is expressed in religious symbols.

The ultimate Marxian question is, however, at a deeper level.

Even if religion is accepted as potentially revolutionary, from a Marxian perspective the tough question remains - can it ever be more than an illusion, albeit a revolutionary illusion? ★

(In the next issue of *The African Communist*, the second and final part of this article will appear.)

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SWEDEN

The Swedish model runs out of steam

In 1976 the Social Democrats in Sweden lost parliamentary elections for the first time in 43 years. In 1982 they won back power. But now, in the most recent Riksdag (parliamentary) elections, the right has won 56% of seats.

What has gone wrong for Swedish social democracy?

In 1938 the Swedish workers' movement and the bosses negotiated a "social contract". This established a consensual style of interaction between the bosses and organised labour. The Swedish model has seen fifty years in which the economy has remained capitalist but in which decades of rule by social democratic governments has led to significant gains in education, housing, health and social security for the people as a whole.

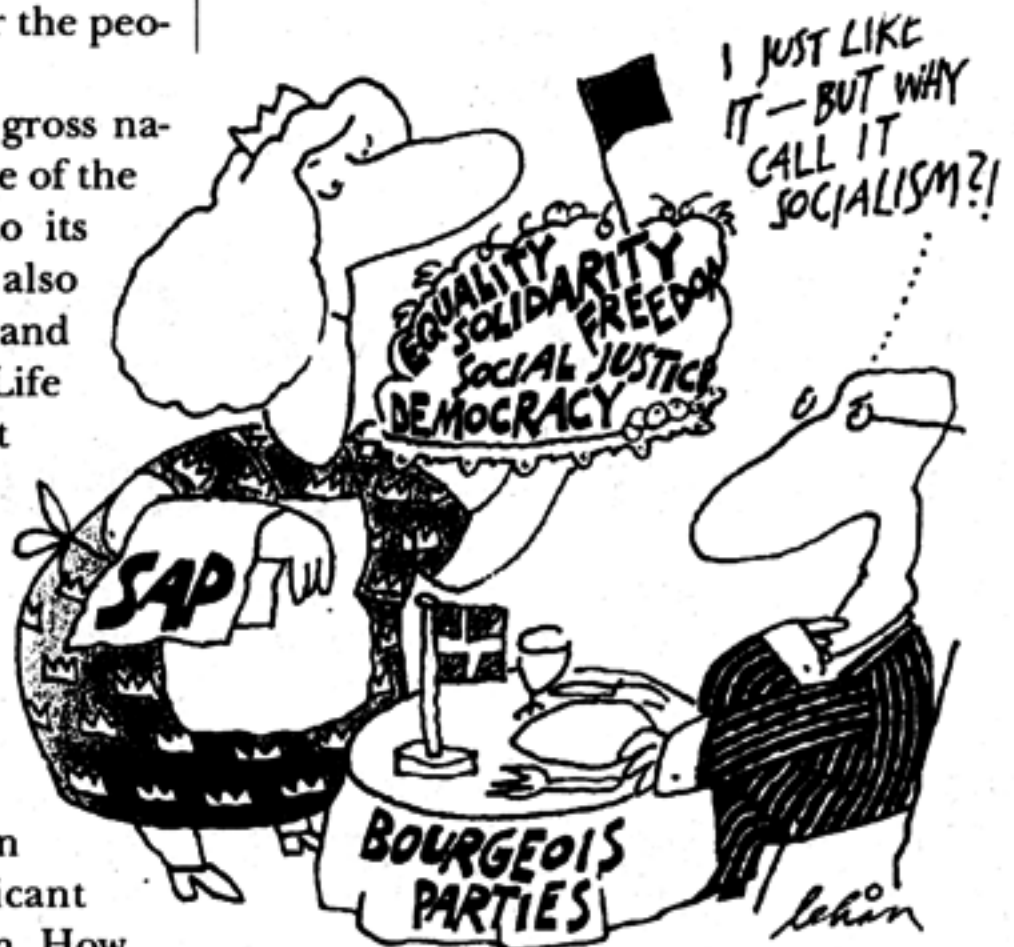
Particularly in the 1970s, the gross national product of Sweden was one of the highest in the world relative to its population size. Wages were also among the highest. Social services and public facilities were extensive. Life expectancy was amongst the best in the world, and infant mortality rates were lower than anywhere else. The educational system was impressive, and included free and obligatory school canteens.

The social contract and the consensual inter-class style of politics it encouraged, has often been credited with the significant achievements realised by Sweden. How

justified is this?

Some writers have begun to question this assumption. They point to other circumstantial factors, external to the Swedish social contract, that have played a significant role in the country's economic achievements. These include a modern industrial base, due to Sweden's relatively late industrialisation (in European terms); the extensive use of hydro-electric power, originally prompted by a shortage of coal resources; and the relatively less traumatic war-time experiences of Sweden compared with most other European countries.

Here in South Africa, the Swedish model is often presented by its supporters as a consensus between the organised working



class and the capitalists. But, as Stephen Gelb points out (*The Weekly Mail*, July 12 1991), "The origins of (Swedish) social democracy were in an alliance between the Social Democratic Party which was the party of organised labour and the party organising the rural population."

The SDP came to power with the support of small farmers, and in return guaranteed better incomes for farmers. Projecting a Swedish social contract onto South Africa as if it were simply between organised labour and the bosses conveniently ignores the massive socio-economic crisis confronting some 40% of our country's poorest - those in the bantustans and on farms, those unemployed, those who are unorganised.

Whatever its achievements, the fact that the Swedish economy has remained in capitalist hands has contributed directly to present difficulties confronting the country. Productive capital has been increasingly exported to countries with much less developed social security systems, and therefore lower wages; there has been a corresponding transfer of national firms to foreign countries; and huge private for-

tunes have also been exported to tax havens.

Economy under strain

The economy is now under strain. Absenteeism is at high levels and continues to grow. There has been a doubling of those on the dole over the last decade. Swedish bosses are increasingly relying on immigrant workers (there are now 1-million immigrant workers in a total population of 8.5 million).

Faced with these growing strains over the last years the social democratic government had increasingly moved rightwards. In 1990, with the objective of cutting inflation, the social democratic government decided to freeze wages, prices and dividends, and to suspend temporarily the right to strike. After some months it renounced these measures, but only to introduce a reduction on medical insurance benefits.

All of this led to a growing sense of alienation and abandonment amongst the SDP's working class constituency. It was against this background that it suffered its recent electoral defeat. ★

ZAIRE

Mobutu: The CIA's man in Kinshasa

If you want to steal, steal a little cleverly, in a nice way." - Mobutu Sese Seko, criticising corruption in Zaire, May 20, 1976.

Mobutu came to power in Zaire after a CIA-backed coup in 1965, following the brutal assassination of the national liberation leader, Patrice Lumumba. During

his 26 years in power, while the Zairean economy has fallen into decay and the people of Zaire have sunk deeper into utter poverty, Mobutu has amassed a colossal private fortune.

Apart from his presidential mansion in Kinshasa (which he has been forced to leave in recent weeks), Mobutu has a lavish

townhouse in Paris, a 32-room estate in Switzerland and a 16th century castle in Spain. He has also constructed a massive palace, complete with illuminated fountains and grand marble buildings, near his birthplace in far north-eastern Zaire, at Gbadolite. To reach the nearly inaccessible spot, Mobutu had a four-lane highway carved through the tropical jungle.

Mobutu's spending sprees on trips to the United States and Europe have become legendary. During a stopover in Maine in the US in 1987, for instance, waiters at a local restaurant watched in astonishment as one member of the Mobutu entourage opened a suitcase filled with cash and counted out more than R150,000 to the settle the bill for one meal. On another US stopover Mobutu treated himself and his 100 strong entourage to a Disney World holiday in Florida. They used a Zairean government plane to get there. The cost? - around R5 million!

In the words of US House of Representatives member, Stephen Solarz, Mobutu "has set a new standard by which all future international thieves will have to be measured."

But, although Mobutu has now expended his usefulness to the CIA and, like Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines before him, he has become an embarrassment to US impe-

rialism, there should be no doubt as to whose creation he is. Mobutu has, for most of his rule, received hundreds of millions of dollars in aid from the US. Successive presidents in Washington have viewed him as a key African ally in the struggle against national liberation and communism.

Working closely with apartheid South Africa, Mobutu was a key player in the joint invasion of Angola in 1975/6 by CIA-backed foreign mercenaries and the SADF. Mobutu has also co-operated with Pretoria over the years in supporting Savimbi in Angola.

The main source of Mobutu's immense wealth has been the direct personal rake-offs he has been taking from Zaire's state-owned copper, cobalt and diamond mines. Apart from mines, Mobutu used "nationalisation" or, as he called his 1973 decree, the "Zairianisation" of foreign owned properties, to personally accumulate a vast agricultural empire of coffee, tea and rubber plantations.

As we go to press, Mobutu is still clinging to power in the face of massive popular hatred and world-wide condemnation. For the people of Zaire this robber of the poor, the CIA's long-serving man in Zaire, cannot be thrown out a day too early.

But who will replace him? The CIA's next candidate? ★

THE RED FLAG

Have you seen The Red Flag?
It's the first video made about the SACP
since the party was unbanned in 1990.
The Red Flag features interviews with the
party leadership, and traces our
history from 1921.
Contact the SACP office for details of
where you can buy
your own copy of this video.
Phone (011) 836-6867



McBride — the paperback thriller

TILL BABYLON FALLS By Bryan Rostron (Published by Coronet Books, London).
Price R28,55

When Albie Sachs began complaining about seamless two-dimensional heroes and faceless, selfless but somehow inhuman “masses” in the fiction and historical records of our struggle, I must confess I thought he was exaggerating.

Bryan Rostron has demonstrated how wrong I was.

His account of the lives and actions of Robert McBride and Gordon Webster is not only well-timed (going on sale in South Africa with the struggle still on for the release of McBride and other political prison-

ers), but it reads like a popular thriller.

Till Babylon Falls requires no political commitment to read it. All it requires is that you pick it up - it then becomes nearly impossible to put it down.

It is a bold first step towards taking the history of our struggle, our story, beyond the confines of dry historical record and of the community of political activists towards a far broader community using a vehicle in the past dominated by the perspectives and values of our own oppressors and of the capitalist West — the paperback thriller.

Rostron offers no overt Message or Moral,

no Historical Lesson, he simply tells a story. That in itself is enough. After 335 pages there is only one possible conclusion: McBride must be freed.

The reason given by the regime for his continued imprisonment is the bombing, on June 14, 1989, of the Why Not Bar and the Magoo's Bar on Durban's beach-front.

The bombing, logically, is the crucial event of the book.

Carried out on the first anniversary of the regime's own, nearly-forgotten but ferociously murderous raid into Botswana, the bombing shook apartheid South Africa in a way few other military actions had done.

With the attacks on Sasol and on the SA Air Force headquarters in Pretoria, it is one of the actions the regime and its supporters will not forget.

In reports on the McBride case, the title "the Magoo's Bar bomber" has virtually replaced McBride's name.

But Rostron has not written a book about "the Magoo's Bar bomber". He has written the story of Webster and McBride and the dozen or so people close to them.

He begins his record of the bombing only on page 193. And by then he has moved the reader effortlessly through the childhoods and youths of the two young men who would eventually form one of

MK's most successful partnerships and on, in nearly faultless, fast-moving thriller style, into the tension of their lives as MK operatives.

The raid on Edendale Hospital to spring Webster is among the most gripping pieces of writing you are likely to find in even the most professionally crafted fiction.

The book has its shortcomings: Rostron obviously wrote it for non-South African audiences and has therefore included explanations which are both unnecessary for local readers and, inevitably in a fast-moving book, paint an over-simplified picture of the political and social backdrop to the activities.

His outsider's fascination with the racial implications of Robert McBride's death-row marriage in 1989 marriage to Paula (Rostron deli-

cately excludes her family name) also jars.

But the main flaw is the coverage of the decision to bomb the two beach-front bars. Rostron sticks to the formal record of McBride's trial and leaves unanswered the question of whether McBride was operating under instruction or, in the heat of the moment, struck out on his own to protest the imposition of the state of emergency.

This is unavoidable. Rostron researched the book nearly two years ago, when - risking execution to protect the ANC-McBride



McBride: Still in prison

was insisting that his unit placed the bomb on their own initiative.

The ANC has since rectified this, publicly asserting that McBride operated "at all times" under direct orders.

Any reprint should correct what for Rostron was no doubt an unintentional and unavoidable error.

Other than this, the flaws are minor - explaining "MCW", for example, as "military code work" - and do not intrude on a vividly but sympathetically crafted record of a fascinating slice of the history of our struggle.

Rostron's style is warts-and-all: the book has heroes, too many to list here, but not the seamless super-heroes of propaganda

and cheap fiction. They are ordinary people: they work, they eat, they sleep, they make mistakes, they are scared (and take pills to calm themselves before operations), but they do it anyway.

And because it is the story of ordinary people who fought the evil of apartheid, it is a story which belongs to the history of our struggle.

We need many, many more such stories, told as well or better. Without them our history and the values it represents will become the badly taught, two-dimensional history of the classroom. For enjoyment and excitement, people will turn to the values and perspectives of paperback thrillers and television movies. -*Steven Wotw*

The carpet weavers of Kuyan-Bulak honour Lenin

By Bertolt Brecht

Often and copiously honour has been done
To Comrade Lenin. There are busts and statues.
Cities are called after him, and children.
Speeches are made in many languages
There are meetings and demonstrations
From Shanghai to Chicago in Lenin's honour.
But this is how he was honoured by
The carpet weavers of Kulan-Bulak
A little township in southern Turkestan.

Every evening there twenty carpet weavers
Shaking with fever rise from their primitive looms.
Fever is rife: the railway station
Is full of the hum of mosquitoes, a thick cloud
That rises from the swamp behind the old camels' graveyard.
But the railway train which
Every two weeks brings water and smoke, brings
The news also one day
That the day approaches for honouring Comrade Lenin.
And the people of Kuyan-Bulak
Carpet weavers, poor people
Decide that in their township too Comrade Lenin's
Plaster bust shall be put up.
Then, as the collection is made for the bust
They all stand
Shaking with fever and offer
Their hard-earned kopeks with trembling hands.
And the Red Army man Stepa Gamalev, who
Carefully counts and minutely watches
Sees how ready they are to honour Lenin, and he is glad
But he also sees their unsteady hands
And he suddenly proposes
That the money for the bust be used to buy petroleum
To be poured on the swamp behind the camels' graveyard
Where the mosquitoes breed that carry
The fever germ.

**And so to fight the fever at Kuyan-Bulak, thus
Honouring the dead but
Never to be forgotten
Comrade Lenin.**

**They resolved to do this. On the day of the ceremony they carried
Their dented buckets filled with black petroleum
One after the other
And poured it over the swamp.**

**So they helped themselves by honouring Lenin, and
Honoured him by helping themselves, and thus
Had understood him well.**

...

BERTOLT BRECHT

(*Poems 1913 -1956*, ed. J. Willett and R. Manheim)

Think of those who have died

by Ernesto Cardenal

When you receive the nomination, the prize, the promotion,
think of those who have died.

When you are in the reception, the delegation, or the commission,
think of those who have died.

When they applaud as you climb to stand with the leaders,
think of those who have died.

When they meet you at the airport in a large city,
think of those who have died.

When you take the microphone and they focus the television on you,
think of those who have died.

When you give out the certificates, the ID card, the permission,
think of those who have died.

See them without a shirt, degraded, bleeding, hooded,
crushed, lost in the heap, electric probe burns,
eyes gouged out, beheaded, riddled with bullets,
thrown at the side of the road in holes
that they have dug as common graves,
or simply scattered over the earth
fertilising the plants of the mountain.

You represent them.
They have made you their delegate,
those who have died.

(Ernesto Cardenal is a priest, a poet and a leading Nicaraguan revolutionary. He served as minister of culture in the Sandinistan government.)



Dr Boesak & communism

For a long time since the unbanning of the ANC and the SACP, and particularly during and after the collapse of most of the east European socialist systems, the level of communist bashing has increased to unparalleled heights. Most of the time this bashing has come from the ranks of capital and the apartheid state. However what if of concern to me, and something that should concern all South African communists, is the steady increase of attacks, privately and openly, on the SACP from inside the structures of the tripartite alliance, of which our party is a key component.

Initially the "bashing" of the party came in the form of the "many caps debate" (excluding, of course, those genuine concerns about the effects of serving in many organisations simultaneously on the effi-

cacy of the alliance). Thanks to the 1991 COSATU Congress for putting this to a rest, albeit temporarily.

More recently the attacks on communism and our party, directly or indirectly, have emerged from the ranks of some figures who have played a very prominent role in the struggles against apartheid. Most notable here is the criticism levelled by Archbishop Tutu. However this is not my concern here.

Challenge

What I am more concerned about are the recent statements made by Dr Boesak on communism and the party. It is our responsibility as communists and more specifically as members of the SACP to challenge some of the notions underlying Dr Boesak's criticisms, lest they leave many people with

wrong impressions. I should however say that in responding to these comments and statements I should not be read as denying Dr Boesak the right to air his views on communism and the SACP. He has a full right to do so both now and even in a future socialist South Africa!

Firstly, Dr Boesak seems to be joining the ANC conditionally, on the grounds that at some stage it will have to break its alliance with the party.

Even when he joined he said that it was only after cde Mandela's statement that the alliance only goes so far as the struggle against apartheid.

Whilst this is not necessarily my main concern here, what needs to be responded to specifically is Dr Boesak's assertion that the alliance between the ANC and our party cannot be logically explained (*Sunday Times* October 13, 1991).

The alliance

Dr Boesak needs to be reminded that the ANC is a national liberation movement, whose strength and prestige has grown over the years through the bond of both communists and non-communists working together for the liberation of our country. Therein lies the logic of the alliance, in concrete struggles of communists and non-communists inside the ANC! The seemingly illogical nature of the alliance is a reflection of Dr Boesak's own reservations about communism.

Dr Boesak also raises the concern that many people within the coloured community of the Western Cape want to distance themselves from communism.

Obviously this cannot be disputed. However, it is equally true that many people from the coloured community see communism and the SACP in particular as an

embodiment of their deepest aspirations and interests.

I do not think it is necessary to mention some of the coloured stalwarts inside our party, who were, and still are, making a sterling contribution to our struggle.

Tolerance

I think it would be better for Dr Boesak to prepare those members of the coloured community, and any other person for that matter, that in joining the ANC they won't have to be members of our party, but at the same time make them aware that the ANC - despite not being a socialist organisation - values its communist comrades with whom it has been marching together as comrades-in-arms.

The last point I would like to make in relation to Dr Boesak's statements is on the issue of political tolerance and democracy. It is in fact quite ironic that communist bashers are doing exactly the same things that they have been accusing the communists of doing, i.e. political intolerance towards different views and ideologies.

In as much as Dr Boesak has a right to claim that Christianity represents the best route to human emancipation, equally, communists have a right to claim that socialism is the highest form of social emancipation.

Of course, not to mention the fact that there are many Christians who are communists as well. We have a lot of them in our very own party. In fact many Christians know and are not intimidated by the fact that outside there, there is always a real world that exists beyond Christian dogma. And it is a challenge to Christianity as a whole to deal with that reality! — *Blade Nzimande (Natal SACP Regional Interim Leadership Group)*

Building the Party

With the building of the party, there are a number of issues that will have to be taken into account. There are potentials as well as dangers that go with the challenge of building a mass party of quality.

Given the diversity of the new recruits of the party, it places a heavy administrative burden on the organisation. The organisation is confronted with a situation where the hundreds of new recruits had, and have, little time to study what the party's leaders painfully assimilated over a much

longer period.

Our education should not be neglected, and the pressure to enlist members should not be greater than the desire to maintain high standards.

One must salute the party for being steadfast in stating that a correct class composition should be adhered to. Yet one must also, as the demand for a mass party grows, caution against not ignoring the class origin of the recruits and those that will eventually go into leadership. — **'B'**

Party education

What exactly does the present membership of the SACP know about the party, and what exactly it is doing?

With our mass concept of the party there are a great number of members who need to be educated and developed on the principles of the the party.

Our members should be able to understand and respect our alliance.

At the same time the party should have a full and complete separate programme of action as the vanguard of the working class.
— *Stanley Khanyile, Johannesburg Central Branch*

Michael Harmel

Firstly, our congratulations on the historic return home of *The African Communist*.

We are also writing to express our upset and concern about the omission of any mention in your editorial, "The 'AC' returns home", of the journal's first editor, our late husband and father, Michael Harmel.

As the journal of the South African Communist Party, *The African Communist* always reflected the efforts of many.

However, Michael played a major role in its initiation and early production.

From 1959, when the journal first began



Michael Harmel

to appear under his editorship, he had primary responsibility for its underground preparation and publication.

In 1962, when repressive measures in South Africa grew markedly more stringent, he was charged by the central committee of the party to continue its production in England. This relocation was one that Michael always believed would be temporary. He continued as the journal's editor until the early 1970s when he went as SACP representative to *The World Marxist Review* in Prague where he died in 1974.

Those who knew Michael will be mindful of the significance *The African Communist's* homecoming would have held for him, of

the triumph and joy with which he would have regarded it.

We were pleased to see his words quoted in the passage you cited from the very first issue of *The African Communist*; but we were sad to see no mention of his name in this first issue marking the journal's return home. - *Ray Harmel and Barbara Harmel, London*

★ The omission was due to ignorance. The ignorance can be explained (but not excused) by the major disruptions in information due to repression, jail, exile and years of enforced secrecy. We are deeply sorry — Editor

Missing the point

Although Jeremy Nathan includes in his contribution on Cosatu's Hlanganani video ('A television breakthrough', AC 125) an apparently critical account of SABC's treatment of the documentary, his general tone is one of approval that democratic movement is, at last, getting airtime.

In doing so he has entirely missed the point of the patriotic front's insistence on an end to exclusive National Party control of SABC as part of the interim government demands.

And his assertion that the screening of the video, politically mutilated as it was by SABC-imposed cuts, represents "a major coup for Cosatu and the liberation of the airwaves" clearly demonstrates a complete absence of any strategic or tactical approach.

Underlying Nathan's article is an assumption that SABC is "their" broadcasting service, and that by persuading them to run

a very brief little documentary from "us" we have somehow "won" something.

This is incorrect: SABC is a national resource, not a National Party forum.

What we need to achieve both under an interim government and under a future democratic constitution is a situation in which it functions as a national resource, reflecting the perspectives and interests of all South Africans.

We do not want a situation in which only those with the massive amounts of money or the political muscle needed to force their way on get represented on the national broadcasting service: that is the situation we are opposing.

The Nathan approach would see us attempting, from a position of weakness, to balance off "their" propaganda with ours - and who can doubt that with their infinitely greater resources and experience, the regime and its allies would win what would, in

effect, be no more than a political advertisement contest.

No, comrades, what we need to achieve with SABC is the kind of non-partisanship that would enable the nation's public broadcasting service to accurately reflect what is happening in our country.

And there can be no doubt that a dose of accuracy on our television screens and out of our radio speakers would not only level the playing field, but tilt it decisively away from those interests which currently enjoy star billing - the apartheid police, the racist state institutions and the economic system which exploits us.

What we want is that the national broadcasting service provides accurate information to the nation to enable people to take informed decisions about their lives.

We will not achieve this by replacing the existing bias with a television propaganda talent contest.

We must hope that Marietta Kruger's treatment of Comrade Jay Naidoo over the general strike has taught Cosatu the lesson that the democratic movement learned so painfully in its negotiations with the apartheid regime: we cannot achieve lasting and meaningful change while the regime that is the major obstacle to change remains in power.

Nathan's hoped-for "liberation of the airwaves" will only be achieved when the major obstacle, SABC's board of government stooges, is replaced. Until then, his "major coups" will only succeed in diluting our struggle for democratic broadcasting.

—*Joe Stahlman, Johannesburg*

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